# THE Nation.

ISRAEL AND LOBBIES
DANIEL LAZARE

# THE FIGHT TO SAVE CONGO'S FORESTS

CHRISTIAN PARENTI

PLUS: THE MAKING OF A CLIMATE MOVEMENT
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OCTOBER 22, 2007
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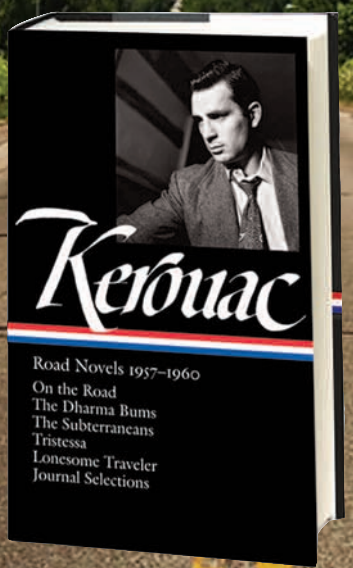


It's time to go On the Road again

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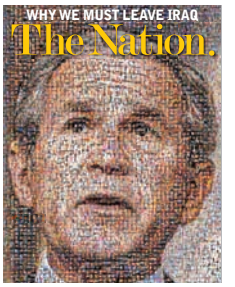
# Letters




## That Cover…

Minneapolis
When I saw the September 24 cover, I was immediately captivated by the Chuck Close style of painting. A closer look showed an extraordinary composite of the photos of American men and women who have paid with their lives… for what? I sat down and wept.
Phyllis J. Peterson

Ardsley, N.Y.
Is the original artwork for the cover of the September 24 issue available for purchase, or, failing that, can one purchase a reproduction? It is a stunning statement of the cost of George W. Bush's colossal folly, and the artist should be highly complimented.
Michael Zinman

Baltimore
Devastating.
J. Basmajian

Longmont, Colo.
Two years into the Iraq War I completed a project that became the cover of the online magazine *Purgatorius* (www.purgatorius.org/Archives/2005Apr-Jun/Cover1.html). I compiled photos of the 1,525 US troops who had been killed in Iraq from March 19, 2003, to March 19, 2005, as well as photos of dead Iraqi children to symbolize the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians who had been killed, and arranged them into a partial mosaic of George W. Bush, the man primarily responsible for their deaths. Placing the photos in the mosaic was a poignant experience: Here were farm boys from Wisconsin, ghetto girls from LA and babies from Baghdad—dead because of the policies of our government.

Sadly, as your cover shows, there are now enough dead troops to form a complete mosaic of Bush—and the number of dead Iraqis has jumped to six figures. We need to remember that this war is still going on in our name, and that we have a responsibility to end it as soon as possible.
Luc Nadeau

Daly City, Calif.
Is there any way my friends and I can acquire copies of the September 24 cover art—the portrait of George W. Bush composed of photographs of military personnel? Everyone I showed it to was overwhelmed with emotion.
Barbara McNeill

*Good news for our many readers who have inquired about the September 24 cover art. A poster is in the works. —The Editors*

## Healthcare Bait & Switch

Mount Prospect, Ill.
I was happy to learn from Trudy Lieberman's "The Medicare Privatization Scam" [July 16/23] that my and my coworkers' ire at Humana's marketing of Medicare Advantage plans is well placed. I work for a large oncology group, and we have had many problems as more and more patients with Humana Medicare plans come to us. Our policy is not to participate in Medicare Advantage plans, because they pass so much of the cost of cancer treatment on to the patient. Subscribers are not allowed to retain any supplemental plan from their traditional Medicare, and they are surprised to find that they are responsible for 20 percent of the cost of drugs administered in the office. The patient's portion for treatment can add up to thousands and thousands of dollars.

At a meeting sponsored by Humana Medicare Advantage, largely focused on Humana's increased presence in the Medicare Advantage market, I spoke with the regional director of sales about how the plans are marketed, because our staff has had to spend a tremendous amount of time educating patients about their coverage. We later met with the Humana Medicare Advantage head of provider relations and a sales manager. They were shocked to find out what patients are having to pay out of pocket for cancer treatment.

In the meantime Humana is pressuring physicians to contract directly with

(continued on page 22)

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# Let Dennis Debate

Dennis Kucinich concluded his smart, pointed yet good-humored participation in the latest Democratic presidential debate by telling the crowd at Dartmouth College that they could have a President who has consistently opposed the war in Iraq, defended civil liberties and fought for single-payer healthcare. "Or," he said, "you can have a President who is tall." Unfortunately, the next President is likely to be of a different stature than the Congressman from Cleveland. But it is far too early to elbow Kucinich off the debate platform. It is troubling that a former big-city mayor, veteran Congressman and one of the earliest and most consistent critics of a war opposed by the vast majority of Americans has already been excluded from some high-profile candidate forums. And it is unacceptable that political and media "deciders" are beginning to angle for more exclusive debates.

EDITORIAL

There is nothing evenhanded about our presidential selection process. The system generally regards as most "serious" those candidates who can raise the most money, while it excludes those who offer radical alternatives, even if they hold views that more accurately reflect those of the American people. Party leaders and media stars err on the side of style over substance. This leaves little space for candidates like Kucinich, who stake out positions that are more visionary than those of the ordained front-runners and who inject ideas into the debate that would otherwise be skipped over. It's not easy to explain the strategic value of disarmament, diplomacy and the need to address persistent poverty in a thirty-second answer to a question about national security. Even Kucinich sometimes stumbles as he tries to leap the hurdles moderators erect to narrow and control the discourse.

Kucinich is not always as flexible or strategically smart as his circumstances demand. And while the candidate has more grassroots support than many senior senators, his seat-of-the-pants organization fails to inspire confidence that he will do much better this year than he did in 2004. But it is a corroded democracy that marginalizes a speak-truth-to-power candidate when so much of the electorate is eager for an alternative not just to the Bush/Cheney Administration but also to the compromises of Democratic Congressional leaders and presidential candidates.

No doubt, it would be easier for Hillary Clinton and her most competitive rivals, Barack Obama and John Edwards, to debate without facing the inconvenient truths that Kucinich, Bill Richardson and Mike Gravel have brought to the podium. But avoiding tough questions about how the occupation of Iraq will end and how a war with Iran can be avoided, about failed "free trade" policies, about the advantages of a single-payer healthcare system, won't make Clinton, Obama or Edwards stronger contenders in next year's election. Wrapping up the nomination and presenting it to an intellectually untested candidate rarely makes for a better nominee, let alone a better President.

It is for this reason that even Democrats who would never consider voting for Dennis Kucinich for President should recognize the value of his continued presence on every debate stage of this front-loaded, pundit-defined, money-managed primary campaign. Perhaps the Congressman is too idealistic to match our strangled definitions of a nominee or a President.

But Kucinich is standing tall for progressive values, bringing bold ideas, tough questions and a sense of purpose to discussions that require these precious commodities. And he should be a part of the debates for as long as the campaign for the Democratic nomination continues.

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John Nichols: Obama's Kennedy Vibe
Jeffrey Chester: Be Worried About Google
Jon Wiener: Clarence Thomas and Rupert Murdoch
Tom Hayden: Secret Iraq Peace Talks
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Christian Parenti: Congo Diary

**STUDENT NATION**
Myanmar Vigil at University of Chicago

**NATION POLL**
What will it take to stop the Bush Administration from attacking Iran?

# Blackwatergate

Erik Prince, the secretive 38-year-old owner of the leading US mercenary firm, Blackwater USA, has seldom appeared in public. He has never held a press conference and is only known to have given one television interview—to Fox News shortly after 9/11. When Congress called him to testify in February, he dispatched his lawyer. But on October 2, Prince found himself under oath in front of Henry Waxman's Congressional committee, TV cameras trained on his boyish face.

COMMENT

Prince was in the hot seat because of the infamous Nisour Square shootings in Baghdad on September 16, in which at least seventeen Iraqi civilians were killed. But Prince would face no questions about the shootings. Waxman said the Justice Department asked him not to take testimony on the incident because it was the subject of an FBI investigation. In Prince's prepared testimony, he said that people should wait for the results of the State Department investigation "for a complete understanding of that event." But the investigative process so far has hardly been impartial. The very morning of Prince's testimony, CNN reported that the State Department's initial report on the shooting was drafted by a Blackwater contractor, Darren Hanner. The next day came the surreal news that the FBI team assigned to investigate the incident in Baghdad would itself be guarded by Blackwater.

At the hearing Prince boldly declared that in Iraq his men have acted "appropriately at all times," and he appeared to deny the company had ever killed civilians, only acknowledging that some may have died as a result of "ricochets" and "traffic accidents." Prince's assertion is simply unbelievable. According to a report prepared by Waxman's staff, drawn largely from internal State Department and Blackwater documents, since 2005 Blackwater operatives in Iraq have opened fire on at least 195 occasions. In more than 80 percent of these instances, Blackwater fired first. And those are just the ones the company reported. The report also reveals an incident in which "Blackwater forces shot a civilian bystander in the head. In another, State Department officials report that Blackwater sought to cover up a shooting that killed an apparently innocent bystander."

Not surprisingly, Prince said he supported the continuation of Order 17 in Iraq, the Bremer-era decree immunizing forces like Blackwater from prosecution in Iraqi courts. Prince said that Blackwater operatives who "don't hold to the standard, they have one decision to make: window or aisle" on their return flight home. In all, Blackwater has fired more than 120 of its operatives in Iraq. Given that being terminated and sent home have been the only disciplinary consequences faced by Blackwater employees in Iraq, the Justice Department should investigate the circumstances of these firings.

Waxman's committee scrutinized one incident: the alleged killing of a bodyguard for the Iraqi vice president by a drunken Blackwater contractor last Christmas Eve inside the Green Zone. Prince confirmed that Blackwater had whisked the man out of Iraq and fired him, and said the company fined him and billed him for his return plane ticket. "If he lived in America, he would have been arrested, and he would be facing criminal

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# Noted.

**THE GOOD INSPECTOR**: "I think Mr. ElBaradei, frankly, is wrong." So said **Dick Cheney** on *Meet the Press* in March 2003, on the cusp of the US invasion of Iraq. Four years, one war and a Nobel Peace Prize later, **Mohamed ElBaradei** has most emphatically been proven right. Cheney, Judith Miller, Ahmad Chalabi, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, the **Washington Post** and the **Wall Street Journal** were, frankly, wrong. There were no WMDs in Iraq; the infamous aluminum tubes were duds; the Niger documents were a forgery. As director of the IAEA, ElBaradei testified to all this in the run-up to war. For insisting on the virtue of diplomacy, he was condemned in the press for abusing his "technical position" and making "a public fuss."

History repeats itself: now that ElBaradei has negotiated an inspections agreement with Iran and opposed the "crazies" who want to "go and bomb Iran," the press has launched another smear campaign. ElBaradei is a "rogue regulator" who "considers himself above his position as a U.N. civil servant," opines the *Post*. He is an "accommodating Egyptian" with "pro-Iranian machinations," warns the *Journal*. Even the chastened **New York Times**—which recognizes ElBaradei as "everyone's best hope"—repeats the Administration line that he has inappropriately become a "world policy-maker, an advocate." The obvious lesson from 2003—that it was the neocons who politicized inspections in Iraq, to ruinous effect, while the inspectors rightly resisted—seems to have been lost.

**THE COMEBACK**: **John Frohnmayer** knows how the Bushes operate. Scion of a prominent Oregon Republican family with a long history of supporting the arts and the GOP, he was George H.W. Bush's chair of the National Endowment for the Arts during the early '90s culture wars. Caught in the cross-fire, Frohnmayer defended the First Amendment rights of some artists, notably **Robert Mapplethorpe**, and enraged the religious right; his decision to veto grants to the NEA 4—**Holly Hughes**, **Karen Finley**, **Tim Miller** and **John Fleck**—angered the cultural left. Ultimately bounced from the NEA post by the elder Bush, Frohnmayer wrote a fine book, *Leaving Town Alive*, then slipped into relative obscurity—until September 12, when he announced an independent challenge to GOP **Senator Gordon Smith**. Now firmly on the side of the Constitution, Frohnmayer opened his campaign with a denunciation of presidential signing statements and the general lawlessness of the latest Bush presidency. "In defiance of the Constitution, President Bush has signed laws and then said he won't enforce them, or that he will take on himself the judicial function of interpreting them," declared the lawyer. "We must respond to [this] constitutional demolition. If he is not impeached, the same constitutional abuse is available to the next Administration." Frohnmayer is just as worried about the Democrats. "Everyone in Congress—Democrat and Republican—is chickening out on this issue," he says. "They are choosing partisan advantage, as they see it, over honoring their oath of office to support the Constitution." JOHN NICHOLS

**SPOILS OF WAR**: According to the Institute for Policy Studies and financial reporter Michael Brush, CEOs at top defense contractors have seen annual pay raises of 200 to 688 percent since 9/11. The average annual salary for a CEO at a top defense contracting firm is now more than $12 million. Some earn more than twice that amount. Last year, **Nicholas Chabraja** (General Dynamics) and **David Lesar** (Halliburton) raked in more than $32 million and $30 million, respectively. It would take a top general in the military sixty-six years and nine weeks to earn as much as the average, and 170 years, forty-two weeks and five days to earn as much as Chabraja.

**JUSTICE AFTER JENA**: Justice comes late to the Jena Six, but at least it's coming. **Mychal Bell**, the 17-year-old who was charged with attempted murder for his role in a fight, was released from jail September 27. He went home one week after thousands of civil rights activists—led by **Jesse Jackson** and **Al Sharpton**—marched through Jena in protest, and one day after District Attorney Reed Walters abandoned his effort to try Bell as an adult. Bell is now heading to juvenile court, backed by an all-star defense; the other five defendants are also awaiting trial.

The case of the Jena Six—in which noose-hangers, white-on-black aggression and an all-white jury were excused while black students' sneakers were considered lethal weapons—has clearly been a "teachable moment for America," as Hillary Clinton put it. It has awakened a new generation to serious racial disparities in the justice system and to the heavy toll young black men are paying in an era of mass imprisonment. Unfortunately, this new campaign may be a long one. In the days following the march, Justice Department officials declined to prosecute the noose-hanging as a hate crime, and prominent scholars **Orlando Patterson** and **Richard Thompson Ford** issued contrarian attacks on the Jena Six and black Americans generally. If this sort of backlash continues to predominate, Jena's "teachable moment" may expire, and the incarceration rate of African-Americans—now at nearly six times that of whites—will keep rising unabated. MARK SORKIN

**FACEBOOKED**: Finally, every serious presidential contender has an official profile on the social networking site Facebook.com. Thus we know the following: **Rudy Giuliani** likes opera and **Dennis Kucinich** likes Willie Nelson. Giuliani is reading *Testimony* by Nicolas Sarkozy. Unlike every other candidate, **Hillary Clinton** lists neither her gender nor her "relationship status." **Mike Gravel**'s favorite quotes are by Thomas Jefferson (one) and himself (three). He enjoys watching *The Lives of Others*. **John Edwards** has posted 341 photos of himself and is a member of the groups John Edwards Is Good! and A Woman's place is in the House…and the Senate!!!! **Barack Obama** likes *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. **Mitt Romney** likes "horseback riding with my wife" and "winning the war against the jihadists." Neither Romney nor **Fred Thompson** lists a religion. **John McCain** attends North Phoenix Baptist Church; his favorite book: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. **Ron Paul**'s status is "asking for your donation to end the third quarter! Use the project code SRP388 when you donate." PETER C. BAKER

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charges," Democrat Carolyn Maloney said to Prince, "but it appears to me that Blackwater has special rules." Prince replied, "We can't do any more. We can't flog him, we can't incarcerate him." When asked directly whether this was a murder, which Iraqi officials have alleged, Prince consulted with his advisers, made a joke about only knowing about such things from crime dramas on TV and described the incident as "a guy that put himself in a bad situation" where "something very tragic happened."

According to the committee report, after the killing, the State Department chargé d'affaires recommended that Blackwater make a "sizable payment" to the guard's family. The official suggested $250,000, but the department's diplomatic security service said this was too much and could cause Iraqis to "try to get killed." In the end, the State Department and Blackwater reportedly agreed on a $15,000 payment.

A pattern is emerging from the Congressional investigation into Blackwater: the State Department's urging the company to pay what amounts to hush money to victims' families while facilitating the return home of contractors involved in deadly incidents for which not a single one has faced prosecution. According to the committee's investigation, "There is no evidence" that "the State Department sought to restrain Blackwater's actions, raised concerns about the number of shooting incidents involving Blackwater or the company's high rate of shooting first, or detained Blackwater contractors for investigation."

If Congress is serious about investigating Blackwater and holding the firm accountable, Erik Prince and his State Department "enablers" should appear on the Hill as frequently as his industry's lobbyists have over the past several years. But their visits should begin with their right hands raised.

JEREMY SCAHILL

*Jeremy Scahill, a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is the author of* Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army *(Nation Books).*

## Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

### A Slightly Insincere Expression of Regret That Newt Gingrich Has Decided Not to Enter the Republican Presidential Primary

It's something that I thought I'd never
Be heard to say out loud, however,
The more we see these other shnooks,
The better old Newt Gingrich looks.

# Leave Us Alone

*For the second annual Nation Student Writing Contest, we asked students to send us an original, unpublished 800-word essay discussing what they consider the most important issue for young people in the 2008 presidential campaign. We received more than 600 submissions from high school and college students in forty-one states. The entries arrived from big public institutions and tiny liberal arts colleges, from rural high schools, Indian reservations and large cities. The students who entered the contest are afraid of being drafted, worried about their friends serving in Iraq, struggling with debt and gas prices and anxious about the world they will inherit. We chose one winning essay—by Ryan Thoreson of Fargo, North Dakota, a recent graduate of Harvard University, printed below—and five finalists, whose essays you can read at www.thenation.com/student. Thoreson receives a cash award of $1,000, and the finalists each receive $250. All receive* Nation *subscriptions. This contest was made possible by the BIL Charitable Trust to recognize and reward the best in student writing and thinking.* —*The Editors*

In an age when YouTube and blogging make every gaffe on the campaign trail virtually inescapable, the right to privacy may seem like a quaintly anachronistic value—especially to the candidates. This situation may be what Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis foresaw in his 1928 dissent in *Olmstead v. United States*. Brandeis argued that increasingly intrusive technology required that the Constitution protect "the right to be let alone…the right most valued by civilized men."

COMMENT

While Americans never amended the Constitution to include that right explicitly, a series of piecemeal decisions culminated in the Warren Court's ruling in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which held that statewide bans on contraception violated the right to marital privacy. Writing for a seven-to-two majority, Justice William Douglas affirmed a "zone of privacy created by several fundamental constitutional guarantees," found in the "penumbra" of the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Ninth amendments. *Griswold* paved the way for landmark cases like *Roe v. Wade* and *Lawrence v. Texas*, making it one of the most influential (and controversial) precedents in recent history.

But as the eightieth anniversary of *Olmstead* approaches, this patchwork quilt of precedent is growing threadbare. Lawmakers have seemingly discarded privacy, chipping away at that right in the name of collective concerns like productivity, security and public morality. The conservative members of the Supreme Court are skeptical of its validity; in their dissents in *Lawrence*, Justice Antonin Scalia qualified privacy as a "so-called" right, while Justice Clarence Thomas maintained that a constitutional right to privacy simply does not exist.

In 2008 the electorate's top priority should be the reestablishment of a right that has been under siege for decades. Privacy should not only include the "penumbra" of protections enshrined in the Bill of Rights; the right to privacy should distinguish private pursuits from public responsibilities and should safeguard our bodies and behaviors against the whims of the majority. Candidates should promote and respect a right to privacy, either by observing that right as a first

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principle of policy-making or proposing a constitutional amendment that would enshrine it in law. While a balance must undoubtedly be struck between individual rights and collective responsibilities, a right to privacy would solidly establish a presumption in favor of individual choice, reversing our deification of the anxieties and values of the majority that guide our policy-making.

The controversial actions of elected officials have bluntly demonstrated that Americans can no longer take privacy for granted. Since 9/11 a climate of fear and hysteria has been coupled with intrusive technology that puts any de facto right to privacy in an increasingly precarious position. Leaders on both sides of the aisle have embraced unprecedented intrusions into the private lives of Americans with laws like the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act, stripping away basic search-and-seizure protections. In many instances, the specter of terrorism has been used to justify illegal wiretapping without warrants, extraordinary renditions and torture. In instances such as these—when the state asserts a compelling interest in detention and interrogation—a vigorous defense of the right to be let alone would affirm principles like habeas corpus, due process and trial by a jury of one's peers, protections that safeguard the individual first and foremost.

By explicitly supporting a right to privacy, presidential candidates could also help settle some of the most divisive and protracted disputes of our time. The shift would be particularly important in cases where intrusive measures are used to monitor those who merely seem suspicious or commit essentially victimless crimes. The tone and tenor of debates about racial profiling, workplace privacy, low-level drug use, sexual harassment, reproductive rights and consensual sex between adults would be radically different with the seemingly benign acknowledgment that Americans deserve their personal privacy. On social issues where a small segment of the public has exerted enormous influence, Americans are constantly reminded that faith, patriotism and markets can rob us of our ability to govern ourselves if we allow those forces to regulate the private behavior of everyone else. As a right that resonates with the mainstream as much as it protects the marginalized, privacy may decisively settle these controversial debates about self-governance and bodily integrity.

A truly expansive reading of the right to privacy might also be used to combat unnecessary intrusions of public interest on our private well-being. For example, candidates could stress that poverty robs us of privacy when the lives of welfare recipients are closely monitored and residents of housing projects have their units ransacked unannounced. And with the expansion of cyberspace and surveillance, privacy lays the groundwork for progress in areas that we, like Justice Brandeis, may not yet be able to imagine.

We have never needed our leaders to insist on the right to privacy as much as we do today, when the privacy of individual citizens has rapidly eroded without any corresponding increase in public transparency and accountability. Obviously, no candidate in 2008 will be able to single-handedly establish a right to privacy—but by insisting on privacy as a guiding principle for policy-making and an ideological cornerstone of our government, candidates have the potential to revive an ideal that's been under renewed attack since 2001. And when they do, they can rest assured that YouTube will capture the moment for generations of profoundly grateful Americans.

RYAN THORESON

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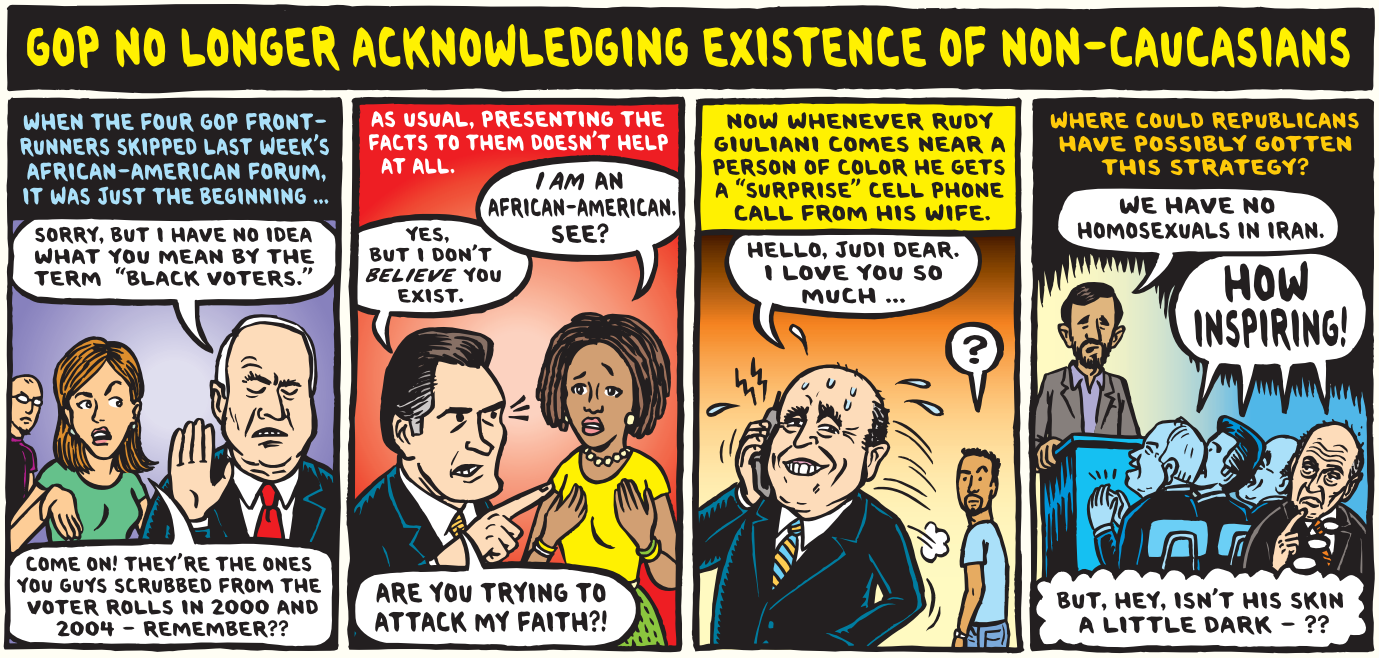
*Ryan Thoreson, co-chair of the Harvard Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Supporters' Alliance from 2005–2006, is a Rhodes Scholar studying social anthropology at Oxford University. His work has appeared in* The Advocate *and* The American Prospect.

# Comix Nation

by WARD SUTTON


GOP NO LONGER ACKNOWLEDGING EXISTENCE OF NON-CAUCASIANS
WHEN THE FOUR GOP FRONT-RUNNERS SKIPPED LAST WEEK'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN FORUM, IT WAS JUST THE BEGINNING ...
SORRY, BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU MEAN BY THE TERM "BLACK VOTERS."
COME ON! THEY'RE THE ONES YOU GUYS SCRUBBED FROM THE VOTER ROLLS IN 2000 AND 2004 – REMEMBER??
AS USUAL, PRESENTING THE FACTS TO THEM DOESN'T HELP AT ALL.
I AM AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN. SEE?
YES, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE YOU EXIST.
ARE YOU TRYING TO ATTACK MY FAITH?!
NOW WHENEVER RUDY GIULIANI COMES NEAR A PERSON OF COLOR HE GETS A "SURPRISE" CELL PHONE CALL FROM HIS WIFE.
HELLO, JUDI DEAR. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH ...
?
WHERE COULD REPUBLICANS HAVE POSSIBLY GOTTEN THIS STRATEGY?
WE HAVE NO HOMOSEXUALS IN IRAN.
HOW INSPIRING!
BUT, HEY, ISN'T HIS SKIN A LITTLE DARK – ??

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# Alexander Cockburn

## Toothless in Babylon

The way things are headed, in two or three months we'll have 95 percent of the American people wanting a pullout from the war in Iraq and 95 percent of Congress obediently voting for funds to keep the troops there. At the start of October only 27 percent of Americans wanted Congress to greenlight the $190 billion Bush has requested to go on fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The *Washington Post* summed up its poll, conducted with ABC News, thus: "Most Americans do not believe Congress has gone far enough in opposing the war."

Here we are in the gray dawn of the twenty-first century, but only a handful of senators and reps dare stand up to be counted on matters of war and peace. The Kyl-Lieberman amendment recommending that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps be placed on the US government's blacklist as a "terrorist organization" was clearly hatched as a way for Bush to attack Iran without seeking Congressional approval. It cantered through the Senate with only twenty-two opposing. The House approved a similar measure with only sixteen nays, just twelve of them Democrats.

The day before the Senate vote, in the Democratic debate at Dartmouth College, candidates Clinton, Obama and Edwards refused to commit to having all US troops out of Iraq by the end of a first White House term—January 2013. The shortest timeline for withdrawal is offered in Senator Russell Feingold's amendment, which requires troops to be out of Iraq by June 30, 2008. That amendment has only twelve Senate co-sponsors, Clinton and Obama conspicuous by their absence.

The Petraeus hearings showed us the feeble state of the antiwar forces on the Hill. A few senators grandstanding for their one-liners to be flashed up on CNN doesn't add up to anything more than popgun combat. No one laid a glove on Petraeus, and that failure is very significant.

Winslow Wheeler worked on the Hill for thirty-one years as a staffer for various senators from both sides of the aisle, also for the GAO. These days he's director of the Straus Military Reform Project at the Center for Defense Information in Washington. His regular bulletins on defense matters, particularly military budgets and appropriations, are always knowledgeable and succinct. He really knows how the system works.

In the wake of Petraeus's easy victories in hearings in both Senate and House, Wheeler looked back at the 1972 hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, taking testimony from Secretary of State William Rogers on the war in Vietnam.* The committee's chairman, William Fulbright, took Rogers apart, exposing time after time the Secretary's evasions and lies. Fulbright, Wheeler recalled, "knew all the facts, uncovered by an assiduous professional staff that discovered a whole lot more than what the Defense and State departments wanted them to know." As the bruised Rogers and his entourage filed out, Wheeler heard one of the Secretary's staff hiss angrily to an underling, "Find out how that son of a bitch found all that out."

Petraeus endured no such relentless interrogation. There were no angry hisses, only smiles at the conclusion of his claims for the success of his "surge." Yet the facts that the senators and representatives could and should have thrown at him were all available, many of them supplied to the relevant Congressional staffers by Wheeler's organization in the form of body counts, information from the United Nations and other sources, plus polling data from the people best qualified to assess whether their security has been enhanced by the surge—namely, Iraqis.

But the senators and reps didn't use the material as Fulbright would have done. Beyond a few brief interrogatory flurries, they mostly stuck to their scripted speeches. As Wheeler concludes,

> All that was politicking, not oversight. Oversight… means finding out exactly what the executive branch is doing and what is going on in the world. Only that, not posturing, provides a sound foundation for competent legislation and the political coalitions needed to enact it. Put simply, if you do not know with some precision what the problem is, you are not going to solve it. And if you don't have the data, mere rhetoric will not always save you, especially when you fail to refute the opposing case.

How good is the staff work on the Hill these days? Ideally, in the battles that matter, it should be a blend of savage investigative zeal and experience in what stones to turn over and where to dig out the pay dirt. How many battle-scarred oldtimers are there, like Wheeler and Jake Lewis, who remember how it was done? How many eager reporters are there for them to leak to? The Clinton era did dreadful damage to conscientious and effective oversight. The Democrats were out of power on the Hill for more than a decade, until 2007. I know of one 50-year-old who recently and successfully applied for a good staff job on an important committee who thinks he got the job partly because there weren't that many applicants.

And even if you have a terrific staff rustling up devastating data, you still need a senator or rep with the wits and moxie to turn the material into an effective interrogation. These days you can sit and watch C-SPAN all year long and rarely see anything beyond camera-preening by the likes of Chuck Schumer. Arlen Specter can take out the razor when he wants to. So can Feingold. So can a few Republican ex-prosecutors. Not many others. You can chart Ted Kennedy's decline in effectiveness by the decline in the quality of his staff. Dig out a clip of Jack Brooks of Texas roasting someone in the witness chair to see how it can be done. The place just isn't what it used to be. ■

*Wheeler's important piece "Posturing at the Petraeus Hearings: Where Was the Oversight?" can be found at counterpunch.org/wheeler10032007.html.

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# Katha Pollitt

## How Different Are the Top Three Dems?

The other night I got an irate e-mail from an old acquaintance on the left. He was furious because I'd quipped in an interview that if people didn't stop making sexist comments about Hillary Clinton, I might just have to vote for her. Maybe he missed the ironic conditional: he thought I supported her. He went on to excoriate Clinton: she is militaristic and ultranationalistic; she would carry on Bush's policy of a long-term occupation of Iraq, define foreign policy around the "war on terror," support the hard-liners in Israel and promote the centrist-Democratic left-smashing ideology of the DLC. We need to rebuild the left, he concluded, and that's why he was supporting… Barack Obama.

If you get your news from the progressive media, especially the web, you would think large fields of ideological difference separate Clinton, Obama and Edwards. I haven't decided who I'm voting for. I would love to see a Democratic woman President; I'm not ashamed to say that. I'd love to see a Democratic black President too. But obviously—I shouldn't have to say this—what matters is what the candidates stand for and to whom they'll be beholden if elected. My problem is, the three don't look so far apart to me—certainly not enough to justify demonizing one and canonizing another, as my left-wing correspondent does. The differences seem more like branding: the strong, experienced woman; the black (but not too black) inspirer of hope; the hands-on economic populist crusader. Or if you prefer, the evil pro-corporate phony and everyone else. No sooner had Clinton announced her healthcare plan, for example, than my colleague John Nichols denounced it as a gift to the insurance industry. Fair enough, but this is the same healthcare plan that Elizabeth Edwards said with some annoyance was copied from the one her husband—the man who cares about poor people—had put forward months before. Obama's plan is similar. Likewise, on the same day that my colleague Laura Flanders wrote that an Obama campaign rally in New York City was buzzing with progressive energy, I read in the *New York Times* about his attempt to woo McCain voters in New Hampshire. Both these things can be true—but isn't being all things to all people a bit, well, Clintonian?

How real are the differences among the top three? Let's take a look. All three candidates want to disengage troops from Iraq while maintaining some kind of military handle on the place. If getting all the troops out ASAP is your top priority, vote for Richardson, Kucinich or Gravel. All of the top three are largely uncritical of Israel (Clinton, in fact, voiced support for a Palestinian state in 1998 and was creamed for it). Clinton probably is a shade more hawkish than the others, but all three buy the trope of the "war on terror"—in August, Obama even said he would strike Pakistan if that's what it took to capture Osama bin Laden. Maybe that was a slip or a mini-pander to 9/11 voters (well, not so mini if you're a Pakistani). He has since made more peaceful noises and followed Edwards in supporting the global abolition of nuclear weapons (a position originally put forward by Ronald Reagan, and now by Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn and George Shultz, so let's not get carried away). On domestic policy, the three have similar boilerplatish positions on education and immigration; all three are prochoice without qualifications. Hurray! But, although nearly three in ten Americans are poor or near-poor, only Edwards has made a campaign issue out of social and economic inequality. Only Edwards seems to grasp the significance of our widening class divisions. Obama, indeed, has suggested he'll reduce taxes on "the middle class," which may be code for "expect no big government initiatives."

How tied in are the top three with corporations and Wall Street? Hillary Clinton is notoriously unapologetic about receiving large donations from wealthy interests. But Obama has received a lot of corporate and Wall Street money too—in fact, he's received *more* money from hedge funds than Clinton. Edwards has refused to accept donations from lobbyists (Obama soon followed his example), but this could be merely a nice piece of branding: there are plenty of ways for the interest groups lobbyists represent to put favors in the favor bank besides writing a check to the candidate.

Right now Obama, not antipoverty Edwards, has the progressive halo, even though his stands on the issues don't place him clearly to the left of his main rivals. I don't know how many people have mentioned to me that he spent four years as a community organizer. That's great, but it doesn't necessarily tell us where he's going. After all, you would not have predicted from Clinton's work for the Children's Defense Fund and her many close friendships in the liberal policy world—or even her strong speeches in support of women's rights around the globe as First Lady—that she would favor the Republican-created welfare reform bill her husband signed in 1996.

If the primary were today, I might vote for Edwards, even though he sometimes seems a bit like a hologram. Or I might go for the candidate I actually agree with, Dennis Kucinich, or the one who seems the most human, Mike Gravel. However, there are still nearly four endless months to slog through: I could be won over by a candidate who just stands up and speaks his or her mind without calculating the effect of every syllable on some indecisive mini-demographic. Someone who will speak frankly about the disaster that is the war on drugs, say, or call for free college education. I would even vote for a candidate who refuses to name a favorite Bible passage on national television. "Tim," this candidate might say, "I'd be happy to talk Scripture with you over a cup of coffee after the show, but in this country religion is private and personal, and if I'm elected I'll keep it that way." There, would-be Presidents of America, was that so hard? ■

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# The Fight to Save Congo's Forests

NANCY HURWITZ KORS

**by CHRISTIAN PARENTI**

At the heart of central Africa's great rainforests lies Kisangani, a small city in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) some 1,300 miles from the mouth of the Congo River. The town began as a Belgian trading post, Stanleyville, and was Conrad's model for Kurtz's inner station in *Heart of Darkness*. No roads connect Kisangani to the rest of the world; over the past two decades they have all collapsed and been retaken by the jungle. Even river navigation is blocked beyond here, as a massive course of falls stretches for sixty miles upstream.

If the vast and isolated forests of the Congo Basin—the second-largest tropical woodlands on the planet—had a capital, it would be this sleepy city of crumbling colonial-era Art Deco buildings and empty boulevards. Down by the river women sell caterpillars to eat, but no one buys them. The sky is low and gray, but it never seems to rain. In the government buildings, yellow-eyed malarial old men sit in empty offices next to moldering stacks of handwritten files. There are no computers, electricity or, in many offices, even glass in the dark wooden window frames.

In a strange twist, this general dilapidation—the result of Congo's traumatic history—has inadvertently preserved Congo's massive tropical forests. First, Mobutu Sese Seko's thirty-two-year kleptocracy destroyed what infrastructure the Belgians had built. Then years of civil war and invasion by Uganda and Rwanda took an estimated 4 million lives, through violence and the attendant ravages of disease. All this chaos warded off the great timber interests. As a result the Congo Basin's massive forests—most of which lie within the DRC—are the world's healthiest and most intact.

An estimated 40 million people depend on these woodlands, surviving on traditional livelihoods. At a global level, Congo's forests act as the planet's second lung, counterpart to the rapidly dwindling Amazon. They are a huge "carbon sink," trapping carbon that could otherwise become carbon dioxide, the main cause of global warming. The Congo Basin holds roughly 8 percent of the world's forest-based carbon. These jungles also affect rainfall across the North Atlantic. In other words, these distant forests are crucial to the future of climate stability, a bulwark against runaway climate change.

But the isolation of the DRC's woodlands is ending. Since 2003 a massive United Nations mission has helped create relative stability, though several vicious and overlapping wars continue to gnaw at the country's eastern regions. Now most of the DRC is safe for logging. Over the past four years timber firms have set upon the forest in search of high-priced hardwoods. They control about one-quarter of Congo's forests, an area the size of California.

Blessed by the World Bank as catalysts of development, the companies operate largely unsupervised because the DRC lacks a functioning system of forest control. The government has written a new forestry code that requires companies to invest in

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# MISGUIDED FRIENDS?
# WAYWARD AUNTS?
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local development and follow a supposedly sustainable, twenty-five-year cycle of rotational logging. But many companies ignore these stipulations; some have used intimidation and bribery; others log in blatantly illegal ways with no regard for the long-term damage they are causing.

And now the massive mahogany, afromosia, teak and wenge trees of Congo are making their way downriver, past the lower falls and over the sea to re-emerge as parquet flooring and lawn furniture in the homes of French, Italian and Chinese yuppies.

If these woodlands are deforested, the carbon they trap will be released into the atmosphere. Environmentalists say that if deforestation continues unabated, by 2050 the DRC could release as much carbon dioxide as Britain has in the past sixty years. On the ground, this would likely mean desertification, mass migration, hunger, banditry and war.

But an effort is afoot to halt Congo's plunder. "This is a make or break period," says Filip Verbelen, a forest campaigner with Greenpeace. "Logging is not helping the DRC's economy, and it is destroying the environment. The damage has to be contained now before it is too late."

Among the major timber firms in the DRC is an American company called Safbois, owned by a secretive family firm called the Blattner Group. The Blattners' other Congo-based businesses include construction, road building, telecommunications, aviation, trucking, port services and agriculture. The managing director, Daniel Blattner, splits his time between a Philadelphia suburb and the DRC, where his family has run businesses since just after independence.

The Blattners have operated in Congo for forty-six years. They purchased some of their best assets after the despotic Mobutu seized them from their Belgian owners. Environmentalists charge that Safbois is logging in violation of local agreements and national laws and with no regard for the well-being of people or the environment.

To investigate all this, I set out to visit Safbois's main timber concession, a 667,000-acre expanse of public land the firm gets to log. It lies near the town of Isangi, where the Lomami River meets the Congo. It is an area of tremendous biodiversity, home to 32,000 people, mostly subsistence farmers.

The first leg of the trip is a flight to Kisangani. I am carrying five forms of official documentation, yet the authorities insist I need more. The underpaid civil servants here toy officiously with the components of a defunct colonial police state, not for the sake of law and order but to demand survival-level bribes. When the authorization is finally ready, it is handwritten on old brown paper, but stamped and signed. On the verso is a typed document concerning veterinary medicine. It reads: "Congo Belge, District de Stanleyville, Secrétariat… 7 février 1957."

To reach the Safbois concession, a local guide and I ride motorcycles west from Kisangani along the Congo on trails that only twenty years earlier had been blacktop roads. The bridges are mostly washed away or blown up, so we cross each tributary by loading our motorcycles into dugout canoes. A continual string of villages unfolds, each composed of thatched-roof mud huts. At times the path is filled with a sweet floral fragrance and clouded with white and purple butterflies. Forests give way to patches of grassland, then clumps of bamboo and then more forest.

After a day of riding, a modern multistory brick building emerges from the wall of jungle greenery: we have arrived at the Institut Facultaire des Sciences Agronomiques de Yangambi. Built in the late 1960s with Belgian aid, the old forestry university at Yangambi is now closed; only a skeleton crew maintains the buildings. But the university still houses a huge biological archive: stuffed birds, pressed leaves, wood samples, 150,000 species in all. There's a dusty old lab, abandoned offices and, according to the watchman, "a cave where King Leopold liked to hide." But the Belgian King Leopold, who owned Congo as a personal fiefdom between 1885 and 1909, never actually set foot in Congo. The university starts to feel like a Surrealist's jungle amusement park, or a monument designed to mock Congo's pathetic lack of a real forest policy. It is the embodiment of everything that should be, but is not.

> 'This company came here just to cut trees, and from the beginning it has been nothing but lies, lies, lies.' —village chief Frédéric Makofi

The next day we cross the Congo and ride deep into the Safbois concession to Baluolambila village. Along a flat stretch of road we stop to talk with a village chief. "This company came here just to cut trees, and from the beginning it has been nothing but lies, lies, lies," says the chief, Frédéric Makofi, as several men gathered around nod their approval. Chief Makofi wants clinics and schools and building materials and transportation. He says much of this was promised but not delivered.

The new Congolese forest code requires that logging companies draw up social responsibility contracts with the communities in their concessions—essentially the law asks the firms to set up company towns. Greenpeace, among others, has attacked this corporate-centered model because it undermines the state's responsibility to create a functioning system of social services. But in the Isangi concession, people say the Blattners won't even create a company town. They claim Safbois used intimidation to force through an agreement and then failed to deliver the promised schools and clinics.

"According to Section 89 of the forestry code, the company must build schools and clinics while they cut the trees. But they are only cutting," says Chief Makofi. He says the company gave the people some gifts and started construction on one school. "At first the people were happy that the company had arrived because they thought logging would equal development." But, Makofi says, it hasn't.

"We don't have any norms or restrictions to impose on the company. This is our first time dealing with anything like this.

*Christian Parenti is a frequent contributor to* The Nation. *Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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There are places that are sacred and the company has gone in to those places and cut trees there. Those trees they are cutting were helping us," explains Chief Makofi. "We want development in exchange." Like many people, Makofi thinks that a well-managed forestry policy could ensure that trees are replanted and allowed to grow while still providing enough timber and income to help raise the standard of living here—balancing environmental protection and development.

His complaints are echoed throughout the Safbois concession. In another village, a mile or two away, we meet a farmer named François Likungo. "There is nothing for our benefit," says Likungo. "And the forest has changed—all the animals have gone. We used to catch antelope and porcupine and possums in snares. But now the animals flee the noise of the machines. Before Safbois came we ate meat five times a month. But now it is just vegetables and cassava."

Two women standing nearby explain that childbirth is risky because the closest clinic has no medicine. School and medicine cost money, but this is an almost cashless society. Among the mob of kids clustered around are several with ringworm sores on their scalps and faces.

First come the roads, and companies take a few hardwoods; then come poachers, settlers and agro firms, and deforestation picks up speed.

We ride farther in and soon the jungle opens onto huge smoldering clearings. Here another Blattner company, Busira Lomami, is clearing land for palm oil groves. It's a dramatic example of the chain of exploitation created by logging: first come the roads, and the companies take a few hardwoods; then on those roads come poachers, settlers and agricultural companies, and the deforestation starts to pick up speed.

At the Safbois compound—a cluster of trailers and mud huts surrounded by a stockade wall—I meet Kanzi, the company's chief engineer. Several months ago, when a Safbois official tried to sink a boat full of activists, a Greenpeace researcher and an Italian journalist were on board and filmed the event. The company came off looking thuggish, so now Safbois is on its best behavior. Kanzi stiffly but politely explains the situation from the company's point of view.

He says that there have been big misunderstandings. The company stopped building the one school after conflicts emerged between villages. The company is waiting for agreement from all the people in the concession before beginning to build schools and clinics in earnest. And he says that far from being exploiters, the company is harassed by environmentalists, who force it to tiptoe around the elephants, okapi and other exotic forest-dwelling animals.

According to Kanzi, tax collectors besiege the company. He offers a rather unimpressive example. "We had to pay $10 just to bring in 20,000 liters of gasoline here at our port. That is very expensive." He says, "The local people are happy to see us. But their friends and brothers, who have gone off to be educated, the intellectuals, they come back and excite the people to do bad things. They stir up trouble." When I ask how much they have logged, Kanzi snaps that it is none of my business.

After our interview I tour the logging camp with another foreman. A stoned police officer with a pet monkey on his shoulder wanders around, and in the distance one can hear chain saws. A harsh sun breaks through the clouds. The foreman explains that the workers are all from distant parts of the country. At the Safbois camp they and their families live in dirt-floored huts. The foreman tells me (and my little video camera) that the Blattners have not paid the eighty or so loggers here since April—five months ago.

To understand the local government's strange relationship of dependence on Safbois, I interview Crispin Kakwaka, the Administrateur de Territoire, at his office back in Isangi. Kakwaka describes the local government's appalling lack of resources. "We have nothing for forest control," he says. "The company gave us a few motorcycles for transportation, that is all. But we can't even inspect the amount of timber the company is sending downriver. We have to rely on whatever statistics they supply."

Coordinating opposition to Safbois is a small NGO called CAPDH. It survives on little grants, mostly from the Belgian government and UN civic education contracts it received during recent elections. Not quite a social movement or a social service organization, CAPDH is a network of about two dozen local intellectuals—part-time teachers, clerks, literate river pilots. Most, though not all, are men, and many of them studied for a few years at the provincial university in Kisangani.

"They [the police and provincial officials] forced the chiefs to sign the social agreement," says Delphin Ningo Likula, CAPDH's leader. "They surrounded the meeting and sent police after the chiefs who would not come to the meeting." Another CAPDH activist, Emmanuel Bofia, tells me, "The company hides logs in the forest, so the true amount they are cutting is not known. They cut trees in graveyards, trees in village meeting areas. They take the caterpillar trees. They are even cutting in the nature preserves deep in the jungle."

How does Safbois respond to these charges? Reached on his cellphone in Philadelphia, owner Daniel Blattner is irate. He denies that his firm is running amok in Isangi and explains away the villagers' frustration as follows: "We have a twenty-five-year concession, and we are building infrastructure as we go. We cannot—it is impossible—to build it all at once! We gave out plenty of support—over sixty bicycles, farming implements. They want 450 kilometers of road. By the time we leave, they'll have 1,000!"

About ten days after I left the Safbois concession, villagers, angry about broken promises and environmental damage, marched on the Safbois compound, pelting it with rocks. Police were called in and fired their guns into the air. Two protesters were reported injured. Days later, a survey party from a different timber firm was attacked near Isangi. The situation in the forest is tense. But to understand the forces driving these events, one must venture beyond the realm of villages, loggers, rough-edged timber camp managers and even comfortable Philadelphia-based capitalists like Daniel Blattner.

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Islamic Mosque, Nairobi, Kenya

### About Your Professor

Dr. John L. Esposito is Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, The Oxford History of Islam,* and *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam.* He has more than 25 books to his credit.

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The real power behind the throne in Congo is the World Bank. It is the single largest lender to this hugely indebted government—$4 billion so far. In 2002 the government of Joseph Kabila signed a moratorium on new timber contracts. But the edict was contradicted by other new laws. Now the Bank is funding a complicated, painfully slow process of timber contract review. The government of the DRC will determine the legality and environmental impact of all 156 industrial timber concessions; tax cheats and despoilers will (in theory) have their contracts revoked. But so far the process is badly behind schedule. Meanwhile, the logging goes on.

In Kinshasa, I meet Kankonde Mukadi, the Bank's forest specialist. Why doesn't the Bank move forcefully to save Congo's forests? His response is high-minded flimflam: "This is a sovereign country. We can only make recommendations based on research."

Environmentalists laugh at this. Lionel Diss of Rainforest Foundation, Norway, was in Congo on a research trip and summed up the Bank's power thus: "If the Bank cut off funds to the DRC government and started imposing green criteria on new loans, and two or three of the most powerful embassies placed phone calls of concern to ministers, and European governments were ready with forest-conservation subsidies, things could be very different."

The real power behind the throne in Congo is the World Bank, the single largest lender to this hugely indebted government.

But in Congo, the Bank's hypocrisy knows no bounds: Despite its stated concern for the rule of law and sustainable forestry, its International Finance Corporation (IFC) is directly invested in some of the worst Congolese logging.

In mid-August the environment minister in Bandundu province impounded two barges of timber belonging to Olam, a $5 billion-a-year Singapore-based transnational corporation that the DRC accused of lying about the amount of timber it shipped, underpaying its taxes and using special "individual concessions" intended for small Congolese operators. The local government forced Olam to pay $34,000 in back taxes, plus some fines. Then in late August, Olam—still under pressure for what DRC officials say were numerous forms of environmentally destructive fraud—abruptly relinquished its two main timber concessions.

The World Bank, it turns out, had invested $15 million in Olam stock and in August still owned $11 million worth. IFC's spokesperson, Corrie Shanahan, was remarkably unfazed by the scandal. "Olam is a client of ours in several countries. We consider them to be a responsible company," said Shanahan. Asked if the DRC's legal actions against Olam were not grounds to reconsider the IFC's investment, Shanahan said, "We believe that Olam has good intentions, and I can't comment on the opinions of the DRC government."

To follow up on all these matters, I meet the DRC's minister of environment, Didace Pembe Bokiaga, in his mahogany-lined office. Behind his desk is a mounted water buffalo head and rising from the floor, two massive ivory elephant tusks. It's not the greenest image, but Pembe says the right things. "President Kabila is working very hard to root out corruption.... We have already recuperated 18 million hectares [of forest] for the state." This last is true, but most of it was land deemed unworthy of logging by timber firms.

"If these are the lungs of the planet, then the donor countries should subsidize us not to log most of it. But we need employment and we will have a sustainable forestry," says Pembe.

My faith in the minister is later shaken when an important timber executive tells how Pembe doubled the "area tax" on logging concessions, only to offer to undo the increase for a contribution of $300,000. The minister denies this charge.

Whatever the truth in this instance, Congo is still a kleptocracy; its massive civil service preys on every productive aspect of the economy. Transparency International rates it as one of the eight most corrupt nations on earth.

Corruption is a common complaint from the companies operating in the DRC, which also excoriate the government for its incompetence. The former general director of Safbois, Françoise Van de Ven, is secretary general of the DRC's main timber syndicate, the Fédération des Industriels du Bois. In her taut Flemish-accented English, she tells the familiar story of an industry under siege.

"This country is totally broken down. So we have to do everything. We build our own roads, run our own port facilities. You can't even get the normal large ships in the port at Matadi because the government has left it in ruins, undredged, no proper cranes. Everything is on the companies. And it is very expensive. At least 20 percent of operating costs goes to taxes. And what do we get? Nothing. And if we build the schools, which we do, will the government send teachers?" She pauses to take a drag on her cigarette and sip her latte.

Congo's culture of corruption extends even to many village chiefs. In one notorious case, a logging company called Safo provided cement, tin roofing, machetes, nets and other basic wares as part of its social contract. The materials went to village chiefs, but instead of hauling the goods to their communities, a merchant offered the chiefs cash for the supplies and resold the goods in nearby towns. Infuriated, the villagers blockaded roads, made threats of black magic against officials and clashed with police; several activists were detained, and one was beaten to death by cops.

The most cogent critic I met in Congo was Arthur Kepel. Born in Kinshasa, he was recruited into Mobutu's secret police, was later the chief of intelligence for the UN mission here and is now with the International Crisis Group. His summation of the Congolese political class—a group he knows well—is painfully blunt: "They worship money. You should ask them, What are they doing for Congo? You can't blame it all on the Belgians. What are these Congolese doing for their country now?" Not that Kepel spares the Belgians. "They owe a moral debt to this country. They plundered it."

When I ask him about the international community, he

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again counters with a question. "What international community? Do the Americans and French coordinate against corruption here? Or does each ambassador try to get the best position for their own national interest, build relations that help the companies from their country get better deals? What do you think?"

Are there any politicians in Parliament who are genuinely trying to protect the environment and create development? Kepel pauses, scrolls through his phone, gives me a number. "But I warn you. He doesn't shake hands."

The next day I meet the man in question, Ne Muanda Nsemi, Member of Parliament and spiritual leader of a sect called Bund dia Kongo. Last May 134 of his followers were massacred by Kabila's troops as they protested against dirty dealing in local elections. Nsemi wears yellow and white vestments and receives me at his simple compound in a hillside neighborhood of Kinshasa. He explains that around a distant star circles a planet called Kongo and that the inhabitants of the old Bakongo kingdom, which once ruled parts of western Congo, were descended from extraterrestrials and Ethiopians. The whole story involves a tsunami, sunken continents, migration from Australia and many other surprising details.

I wonder if this is Kepel's idea of a joke. Then I get in a question about forest policy. Suddenly the millenarian discourse gives way to nuts-and-bolts politics. "The international community should pay for conferences that can be broadcast to educate people about the value of the forest and about the law. In Parliament we need to cooperate across party lines." He says the DRC needs sustainable forest industries, scientific management of the resources and subsidies from industrialized economies to preserve the forest for the sake of climate stability. "This planet is getting warmer—everyone needs these forests."

The main Congolese environmental organization working to save the forests is a small NGO called OCEAN, which serves as the link between international outfits like Greenpeace and local community groups in the concessions. This nascent green movement is calling for an immediate halt to illegal logging, by which they mean most logging in the DRC. But they also say that the DRC needs to develop the rule of law if a logging moratorium is to work—a long-term project, to say the least.

If the forests are to be saved, there will have to be north-to-south subsidies—call them conservation concessions or climate reparations. Paying the DRC not to log is hardly without problems, such as the boundless corruption of local officialdom—but even despite this, subsidies could help to keep chain saws and bulldozers out of the forests.

The communities desperately trying to leverage funds from logging firms will need something else in order to survive. And if massive subsidies are good enough for the tidy gingerbread farmsteads of Germany, the pretty backdrops of France and for US agribusiness, then surely the richest economies can spend to save the wilds of Congo, upon which we all depend. If Congo is deforested, the impact will be grim—and global. ■

We must begin thinking like a river if we are to leave a legacy of beauty and life for future generations.

- David Brower

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# The Making of a Climate Movement

Along with temperatures, consciousness is rising. Washington may soon feel the heat.

**by MARK HERTSGAARD**

Public awareness of the climate crisis has grown enormously in the United States over the past two years, but the government's response lags far behind. Now, however, Washington's sluggish pace is calling forth a surge of activism aimed at persuading the next President and Congress to be far bolder—to advocate and deliver solutions as big as the problem.

"The general attitude in the country now and certainly in Congress is, 'Let's take some steps, make some progress and applaud ourselves.' That is not sufficient." So says Betsy Taylor, chair of 1 Sky, a new initiative that hopes to unite the broad array of groups focusing on climate change into a coherent national movement. "What has happened to the climate in the last twelve months has changed the game," Taylor argues, citing recent studies projecting that the Arctic will be free of summer ice by 2030. "That means we are thirty years ahead of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's worst-case scenario for Arctic melting. But on Capitol Hill, none of the proposals getting serious attention propose anything close to what science says we need—deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 80 percent cuts by 2050. Our side really needs to up the ante."

Among 1 Sky's backers is Bill McKibben, who in 1989 published the first important book on global warming, *The End of Nature*. In January McKibben founded Step It Up, following a march across Vermont he organized with some of his students at Middlebury College. "Our slogan was, Screw in the new light bulb but then screw in the new federal policy," he recalls. At the march's closing rally, in front of 1,000 cheering demonstrators, all four candidates for national office from Vermont signed a pledge to support 80 percent cuts by 2050.

Step It Up was founded to replicate that success on a national scale, and in April the group catalyzed 1,400 demonstrations in all fifty states. "A lot of students participated, but most of the actions were done by people with full-time jobs who told us, 'I want to do something besides writing a check,'" says May Boove, a 2007 Middlebury graduate and the national coordinator of Step It Up. "Contrary to popular belief, asking people to do more actually resulted in a bigger response."

Step It Up plans another set of demonstrations November 3, exactly a year before the 2008 election. This time, the goal is to get elected representatives to respond to 1 Sky's three demands: (1) cut emissions 30 percent by 2020 (and 80 percent by 2050);

LAUREL & DAVID SAMMONDS

(2) ban new coal-fired power plants (as part of a larger shift of federal subsidies from fossil fuels to clean energy); and (3) create 5 million "green-collar" jobs.

The same weekend, the Energy Action Coalition is promising to bring thousands of student activists to Washington. With member groups on 200 campuses, the coalition is the national hub of student organizing on climate change. After a weekend conference at the University of Maryland, the coalition hopes to unleash 5,000 students on Capitol Hill the following Monday to lobby for the 1 Sky demands.

1 Sky, which debuted at the Clinton Global Initiative in September, is not so much a new group as a point of convergence for the larger movement, says Taylor. The impetus came from state and local environmental groups and religious leaders frustrated by what was (not) happening in Washington. 1 Sky is reaching out not only to environmental groups but to labor, community development, Latino, African-American and green business organizations, and is having "positive conversations" with Al Gore's Alliance for Climate Protection. "1 Sky will have a lean campaign staff and primarily invest resources in existing groups," says Taylor. "And we will move into the electoral arena in a big way," with field operations in twelve key states and earned and paid media, i.e., news stories and ads.

The 5 million green-collar jobs 1 Sky is demanding are crucial to appealing beyond the traditional environmental constituency, says Van Jones, a veteran African-American activist and 1 Sky supporter whose new group, Green for All, "aims to spread the benefits of the green energy revolution to all parts of society. Now the implicit assumption is that green means white. When *Vanity Fair* does its green issues, you don't see many people who look like me in there. Green for All is demanding a $1 billion commitment from the government to lift 250,000 people out of poverty and into the new economy by training them for green-collar jobs."

The emerging climate movement's first skirmish will come in the next months, as Congress considers bills on energy and climate. McKibben says it would be better to pass nothing than to approve a weak bill that gives people the impression the problem has been solved: "Since Bush is

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going to veto it anyway, there is no reason to make [a climate bill] less ambitious than what science requires. Climate change isn't like other issues. It doesn't do any good to split the difference to reach a deal everyone can live with. Climate change is about the laws of physics and chemistry, and they don't give."

What gets accomplished in 2008, says Taylor, will frame the choices made in 2009 and beyond: "We want to raise the bar of what's possible for the next President and Congress. We want bold leadership commensurate with the scale of the problem." McKibben argues that "with every passing week it is more clear that climate change is the great issue of our time, just as civil rights was in the 1960s." Passing a bill that matches what science says and then securing a similar agreement at the international level "would be two of the hardest policy achievements we have ever had to do," he adds. "And I'm not sure we're going to succeed. But if we are to succeed, I am sure we're going to need a movement just as strong as the civil rights movement was. And that's what we're trying to build." ■

# How to Fix Our Broken Economy

Higher wages and increased public investment will stimulate productivity and growth.

**BY JEFF MADRICK**

The American economy is broken. And it's not likely that the Democrats, even if they do as well as expected in the 2008 elections, are going to fix it. Of course, there's no chance that the Republicans will either, wedded as they are to endless tax cuts.

The experience of the past decade makes clear the need for a sharply new way of thinking about the economy. The subprime mortgage crisis, although dangerous, is not the issue. It's not even the rising prospect of recession and lost jobs. The real problem is that even when the financial times have seemed to be healthy, the economy was not. Since the 2001 recession gross domestic product is up, profits are at record levels and unemployment is low—but wages, capital investment and, now, productivity are weak. Without these, there is little on which to build an economic future.

Wages for the typical male are actually down since 2001. The fabulous accrual of private fortunes comes at a time when a typical household's income is lower than it was in 1999, despite the many working spouses. And while subdued wages have enabled companies to generate soaring profits, capital investment in equipment and computer software has in recent years been significantly lower as a proportion of GDP than it was in the late 1990s.

Productivity should be the biggest worry, but it gets the least attention. After growing robustly for a few years, productivity growth since 2003 is as low as it was before the Internet boom. Productivity, defined as the output the nation can produce per hour of work, is the nation's source of wealth. If it doesn't rise rapidly, there is no chance workers on average will see their standard of living rise.

Finally, the value of the dollar is significantly lower, and the trade deficit, though improving, will remain a problem. A lower dollar makes exports more competitive, but even with this dollar, rebalancing the economy will not be easy. After years of living with a high dollar, manufacturers don't have the capacity or trained workforce to make many of the products the rest of the world wants.

Tinkering with the safety net, placing a few restrictions in trade agreements or pressuring the Chinese to raise the value of their currency will not fix matters. What America needs is a set of policies that will make it a high-wage nation again, no longer dependent on ever increasing consumer debt and work hours to make ends meet. It must once again invest adequately in the public goods and services required to compete in the new century, including early education, transportation infrastructure, energy conservation and healthcare reform. The mainstream economic model on which most Democrats have relied since Bill Clinton's presidency will not deliver this. Here are a few of the key precepts of the outmoded mainstream model—hardly an agenda for our times.

*Wage growth must be moderate.* Every time wages have gone up more than moderately since the 1980s, Wall Street and Washington worry, and this has long included the Democrats. Fearing inflation, the Federal Reserve clamps down rapidly if wages begin to increase the way they once did—with overwhelming support from both parties. The one exception was the late 1990s, when the Fed allowed a wage rise in anticipation of rapidly rising productivity to offset it.

All this didn't start with the newest wave of job offshoring. As Isabel Sawhill of the Brookings Institution and John Morton of the Pew Charitable Trusts recently reported, a typical male in his 30s makes less today, after inflation, than his father did a generation ago. MIT economists Frank Levy and Peter Temin are the latest of many who have shown that even for men with college degrees, wages have not been keeping up with productivity since sometime in the 1970s.

*Low taxes mean fast growth.* "Case Closed: Tax cuts mean growth," wrote former Tennessee Senator and GOP presidential hopeful Fred Thompson in the *Wall Street Journal* in April. But most Democrats are hardly champions of tax increases either. Both parties emphasize that by minimizing government regulation and social spending, market incentives will stimulate productive investment. Moreover, they see low wages as a way to deal effectively with overseas competition. House

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**SCIENCE AND ETHICS**

**Can Science Help Us Make Wise Moral Judgments?**

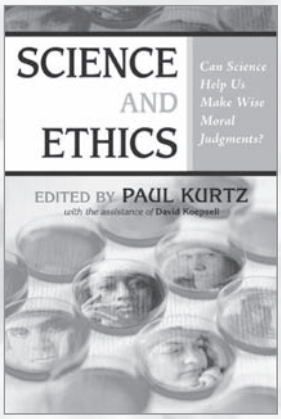
Edited by Paul Kurtz
with the assistance of David Koepsell

359 pp /ISBN 978-1-59102-537-5 / PB / $21

In a world confronted by conflicting moral values, the question is often raised, "Can science help us solve our moral problems?" Many insist that morality is derived from religion. Critics point out that the believers in God often violently disagree. Many scientists hold that there are no ethical standards implicit in science.

Paul Kurtz maintains that naturalistic ethics is directly relevant to both science and ethics. This book focuses on the biotech revolution.

Among the 30 contributors are Mario Bunge, Arthur Caplan, Thomas Szasz, and Susan Haack.

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Democrats, for example, are considering lowering corporate income taxes.

*Balancing the budget increases savings.* Mainstream Democrats and Republicans alike believe savings are the key to economic growth and that the most direct path to more savings is to reduce budget deficits. It's a page right out of pre-Depression economic theory. Since the early 1980s, when massive deficits became the norm, budget balancing has become a self-destructive rallying cry of the Democratic Party. By contrast, some Republicans, like Thompson, will give up savings for lower taxes and an ever lower ceiling on government spending, thereby "starving the beast." Surveys find that Americans who identify as Democrats are more concerned with the size of the federal deficits than are Republicans, a reversal from two decades ago. But the best way to raise savings is by growing incomes.

*Public investment is not as important as a balanced budget.* Republicans in general are distrustful of public investment. But when it comes to choosing between a budget deficit and investment in infrastructure, early education systems or basic research, most Democrats choose a balanced budget. This has left the nation bereft of the most critical foundation for the economic future.

Do Democrats really believe America can succeed in the coming century without high-quality, universal early education? Do they believe the nation will be satisfied with a rate of college attendance that is now exceeded in other rich nations? Do they believe we can get by with roads and bridges that professionals grade a C or D?

Some proponents of the savings model still believe the Clinton boom was proof that it worked. The tax hikes of 1993, they argue, cut deficits and increased savings. In fact, the Clinton boom was led by government stimulus of demand, a good old Keynesian tactic. Other factors, of course, also contributed, including the remarkable fall in computer-chip prices and the rise of a new crop of innovative mass-market corporate giants. But government stimulus was supplied by the Federal Reserve under Alan Greenspan, who kept interest rates low in the late 1990s, in part to calm the fragile financial markets during the international crises of 1997 and '98. In addition, consumers and businesses spent lavishly, supported by borrowing against the rising value of stocks and their homes.

This can't last. Building a nation on credit rather than higher wages has led to record levels of debt, compared with income; dependence on a high dollar to attract foreign capital (thereby undermining manufacturing at home); and the current subprime mortgage crisis. And families can't work many more hours than they do now.

Policy-makers need a better way to think about the economy, and there is one. It is a model grounded in history and based on what economists call demand-led growth theory. It partly harks back to John Maynard Keynes, who during the Great Depression argued that inadequate demand for goods and services is a primary cause of economic stagnation: When economies run at less than full employment of their capacities, it is because of a lack of buying power. Raising savings can, in fact, lead to stagnation because it reduces purchase of goods or services. Keynes argued that even if the government runs at a deficit, it is imperative to

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stimulate buying power.

Another argument for maintaining buying power is that increases in demand do not merely help to fully use otherwise underused resources; they can also increase an economy's productivity in just the way Adam Smith suggested. High demand enhances productivity by making it possible to exploit economies of scale. The division of labor can result in lower costs by producing more volume, but this is only worthwhile if you can sell many more products.

Contemporary demand-theory economists in Europe, Britain and the United States have added new wrinkles: growing output stimulates more investment, and more investment creates new ideas and other spillover consequences that can induce still greater investment. The increased production and investment also results in "learning by doing," another important source of increased productivity: you learn more about how to produce efficiently, in other words, as you do more producing.

This way of thinking about economic policy has broad consequences. It means higher wages are not just a cost of business; they are exactly what Henry Ford talked about when he justified paying workers up to $5 a day, well more than the going rate. He had to be sure someone could buy his cars. Demand-led theory points out that if wages rise, they can stimulate productivity, reducing pressure on business to raise prices. Given this dynamic, Federal Reserve policy can take greater risks of higher short-term inflation. Today's seemingly low unemployment rate, as unlikely as it may appear, can be pushed still lower.

Such a theory means that federal policies to promote higher wages have an additional justification: economic growth. Higher minimum wages, support of living wages and laws more favorable to unionized labor may actually improve productivity and benefit us all rather than being a cost to society.

When one also considers the potential social and fiscal returns from public investment, the Democratic determination to balance the budget makes no sense. There is overwhelming evidence that the benefits of public investment in some cases generate enough additional income and cost savings that the resulting revenues cover most of, or even more than, the initial cost. The most promising are studies of early education programs that have made their participants better workers, better citizens and probably more fulfilled people. An important new model developed by William Dickens and Charles Baschnagel at the Brookings Institution assesses the fiscal returns that will be produced by a high-quality universal early education program. Over time, the cautious researchers find, the returns in higher government taxes and reduced welfare expenditures will more than pay for the programs.

The Congressional Budget Office should similarly score the potential returns of public investment in transportation, energy conservation and research projects. It typically regards such outlays as costs with no future tax benefits. Thus, a $100 billion expenditure may in fact be only $50 billion over time, as tax returns rise because of an improved economy. In some cases, that $100 billion outlay may be wiped away entirely.

Healthcare reform fits into this category. A new, efficient healthcare system, many claim, will pay for itself over time through reduced administrative expense and healthier people who require less expensive care. Still, even in the best of cir-

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cumstances, there will be substantial initial outlays. With the support of demand-led theory, Democrats can tolerate such deficits in the short run. Without it, serious healthcare reform, despite the encouraging proposals of some Democratic presidential candidates, will remain a pipe dream.

There are two final components of this approach to economic policy. The first has to do with globalization. The objective of trade pacts should not be to protect American workers per se but to bring to the rest of the world the progressive revolution in living standards that US factory workers started to enjoy a century ago. Higher minimum wages, protection against labor abuses, adequate healthcare and a decent environment will help develop domestic markets in these nations, which will in turn stimulate their productivity growth and make them less dependent on exporting to the United States. Meanwhile, Americans will compete on a more level playing field and find export markets for their goods.

The other final component is the re-regulation of finance. Our financial system now operates under a set of domestic incentives that strongly favor short-term profits, from which CEOs personally benefit. Some in Congress, notably Representative Barney Frank, are taking up this cause. Addressing these issues should be an integral part of a new economic model, including requirements for more transparent reporting (including on hedge funds and other private investment vehicles), greater shareholder power and more restrictions on how executives are compensated. The system also favors debt. Closer oversight of credit standards is required.

Similarly, the international flow of hot capital has upended theory about the system of floating exchange rates. The fact that America's dollar stays high despite a huge trade deficit is not self-correcting. As Robert Wade of the London School of Economics argues, some intelligent combination of semi-pegged currencies and capital-flow restraint would go miles toward rebalancing the international economy.

The mainstream Democratic model is at best outdated; at worst, it never worked. Wages can surely rise too rapidly and contribute to destabilizing inflation, as occurred in the 1970s. Inflation can be embedded in the expectations of labor and consumers, making it intractable. Very high inflation will distort the economy. Budget deficits can be too high. But we are a long way from such an economy. Policy-makers are fighting the last war. The wage share of the nation's income has fallen sharply since rising in the late '90s. Inflation is at rock bottom and inflationary expectations are weak. Labor unions, which in the '70s helped push wages high, are now too weak to bargain for a fair share. The budget deficit is low.

And so are taxes, for that matter. No economist has ever made a defensible case that high taxes impede economic growth in the long run. Joel Slemrod of the University of Michigan methodically analyzed studies on high-tax and low-tax countries and found that tax rates did not affect growth. Nancy Stokey of the University of Chicago and Sergio Rebelo of Northwestern University note that the long rise in the income tax since 1913 has "produced no noticeable effect on the average growth rate of the economy."

Let's also keep in mind that until twenty-five years ago America generally paid the highest wages in the world. Government was often an equal if sometimes too reluctant partner in the economy. In a time of wide-eyed confidence in the power of private enterprise, whose dynamic energies are vital and will remain remarkable, Americans should remember that government guaranteed access to land in early America, built canals, established free primary schools and later high schools, started agricultural universities, subsidized railroads, sanitized cities, protected workers, established a central bank, built highways and generously helped the elderly.

When America has been at its best, it has been willing to experiment rather than retreat. Current mainstream thinking has ushered in a self-defeating age of limits. It will take both government and business to break the yoke that unnecessarily burdens us. ■

# Letters, continued

*(from page 2)*

it and drop the contracts we have through independent physicians' associations and physician hospital organizations. The direct contract reimburses at a much lower rate; Humana tells us we will soon not have any choice but to accept what it offers.

Theresa Hart

Lynchburg, Va.

Humana is even more insidious than Trudy Lieberman's description. After living in England for many years—and receiving free healthcare—I retired to Virginia in 2005. First I took a Humana Part D policy but later signed up for its Gold Choice PFFS policy. The representative had an easy task. He offered Medicare Advantage free of charge; I would pay just $550 for each Medicare-covered hospital stay instead of $992; my previous year's $20 a month for Part D was included, so I saved that; and he offered free membership at the local YMCA or health club. It all seemed too good to be true.

The first hint that something might not be right came when I went to my primary care physician. He told me many doctors do not approve of Humana and that he did not accept Humana patients. I protested to Humana, and it sent me a list of local doctors who accept its plan. I did not understand then the unpleasant politics behind Humana and others. I now know Bush has been throwing billions to these companies to undermine government health programs. I am appalled.

Bill Haynes

San Francisco

After reading Trudy Lieberman's article on Medicare, I am happy I am very old and living on my Social Security. It really scared me. I may be able to get medical care until I die, that is if Georgie and Dick don't manage to stop the election in 2008. Is this just one more of the attempts to wipe out all the social programs we've had in place since FDR? I have children and grandchildren, so I pray that 2008 will bring a responsible Democratic Administration with enough clout and sense to bring back the programs lost to us in the past seven years. It would also be nice to see the entire Bush Administration sent to the World Court in The Hague for ruining our country.

Peggy Cartwright

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# Books & the Arts.

REUTERS PHOTO ARCHIVE/NEWSCOM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu receives a standing ovation during his address to a joint session of Congress, July 10, 1996.

# Lobbying Degree Zero

**by DANIEL LAZARE**

On March 23, 2006, John Mearsheimer, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt, a professor of international affairs at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, published a lengthy article called "The Israel Lobby" in the *London Review of Books*. Their thesis: a group of pro-Israel activists and propagandists is actively manipulating policy in Washington to benefit the Jewish state at the expense of the United States' national interests. The article had been on newsstands for just a couple of weeks when a neoconservative professor at Johns Hopkins named Eliot Cohen slammed it as "anti-Semitic" in the *Washington Post*. Several letters published in April in the *LRB* piled on by making similar charges. The editors then took the unusual step of turning over much of the letters column in the May 11 issue to Mearsheimer and Walt, who wrote a 2,200-word reply to their critics and defenders.

Mearsheimer and Walt were in the hot seat again in early September. A book-length version of their argument was barely in stores when David Remnick attacked it in *The New Yorker* for being "a prosecutor's brief that depicts Israel as a singularly pernicious force in world affairs." Later that month Mearsheimer and Walt were scheduled to discuss their book at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, but as a *Wall Street Journal* blog reported, the event was canceled due to pressure from "critics who were uncomfortable" with Mearsheimer and Walt's position. Given the kind of people who are criticizing Mearsheimer and Walt and the way the anti-Semitism card is used to silence dissent on the Israel-Palestine question, many might feel compelled to defend their thesis.

They should think twice before doing so. To be sure, Mearsheimer and Walt are not anti-Semites, and *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* does not portray Israel as uniquely evil or "singularly pernicious." But just because a book is not bigoted does not mean it is good, and the one that Mearsheimer and Walt have written suffers from significant methodological deficiencies, which is a polite way of saying it's a mess. In expanding their 13,000-word article into a 500-page book (with more than 100 pages of notes!), they have succeeded mainly in exacerbating the flaws of their original argument. They seem to know little about how American government works, how lobbyists function or how the United States interacts with the world at large. They are blind to history and tone-deaf to ideology. Because they blame America's Middle Eastern rampage on a knot of wily Zionist agents, they seem to think that the US role in the region would turn benign if those agents were removed.

The result is, bizarrely enough, an exculpatory portrait of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice and the rest of

**The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy**
By John J. Mearsheimer
and Stephen M. Walt.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 484 pp. $26.

**The Deadliest Lies**
*The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control.*
By Abraham H. Foxman.
Palgrave Macmillan. 256 pp. $24.95.

*Daniel Lazare is the author, most recently, of* The Velvet Coup: The Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Decline of American Democracy *(Verso). He is at work on a book about the politics of Christianity, Judaism and Islam for Pantheon.*

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the "Vulcans," whom Mearsheimer and Walt depict as naïve but fundamentally well intentioned. The American people should not blame them if they've made a mess of things in Iraq. It's not their fault, you see. Foreigners made them do it—or, if not foreigners, then Americans loyal to foreign interests.

Mearsheimer and Walt are a classic example of pundits hatching a thesis and then hacking away at the facts to make them fit. This is not to deny that their argument possesses a certain superficial plausibility. Clearly, Israel's influence in Washington is enormous, and certain prominent neoconservatives have been remarkably candid about where their true loyalties lie. Elliott Abrams, currently an adviser to Condoleezza Rice, wrote in 1997 that "there can be no doubt that Jews, faithful to the covenant between God and Abraham, are to stand apart from the nation in which they live. It is the very nature of being Jewish to be apart—except in Israel—from the rest of the population." If Israel is the only place where someone like Abrams feels at home, then presumably his chief concern is ensuring that it continues to flourish. On a similar note, Stephen Steinlight, former director of national affairs at the American Jewish Committee, once remarked that, as a "Jewish nationalist [and] even a quasi-separatist," he was raised in "the belief that the primary division of the world was between 'us' and 'them.' Of course we saluted the American and Canadian flags and sang those anthems, usually with real feeling, but it was clear where our primary loyalty was meant to reside." If it ever comes to a matter of "us" versus "them," it seems likely that Steinlight would side with the former.

So, yes, there is a pro-Israel lobby in Washington. Yes, it is powerful. And yes, critics like Mearsheimer and Walt are hardly out of bounds in asking if the lobby, which they go to great pains to demonstrate is composed of both Jews and gentiles, is truly serving what the authors consider to be the American national interest.

But formulating questions about the lobby's influence is precisely where Mearsheimer and Walt run into trouble. On the one hand, the Israel lobby is no different from the Taiwan lobby, the Cuba lobby or, for that matter, the NRA or AARP: all are dedicated to trying to game America's complicated constitutional machinery to their advantage. On the other hand, the Israel lobby is plainly different—bigger, more influential, more important as an intellectual force in government, media and academe. Yet when the authors attempt to pinpoint exactly where that difference lies, their language turns fuzzy. "The Israel lobby is not a cabal or a conspiracy or anything of the sort," they stress. But it is not quite a lobby either, since not everyone in it actually lobbies. Perhaps, they suggest, it is better to describe it as merely a "pro-Israel community" or a "help Israel movement" consisting of individuals who "actively work to shape American foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction." Attempting to dispel the fog, they write that maybe the best way to describe it is by describing what it is not. Other interest groups are occasionally rebuffed on Capitol Hill, but the Israel lobby is distinguished by "the absence of effective opposition." Where other lobbies lose now and again, the Israel lobby is distinguished by "its extraordinary effectiveness"—the fact that decisions in Washington about Middle East policy almost always align with its interests.

**Like any lobby, the Israel lobby tries to game the White House and Congress to its advantage.**

So where does that leave us? With a pro-Israel lobby consisting, not surprisingly, of pro-Israel activists who are essentially unopposed in a foreign-policy establishment in which the pro-Israel consensus is virtually 100 percent. The arrangement calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges's sly parable about a map so detailed that it was as big as the empire it was meant to depict. The Israel lobby, by the same token, is a conspiracy so vast that it is essentially conterminous with the policy-making centers it aims to control. Since it has the field to itself in Washington, it is no longer a lobby but a kind of committee of the whole. It has no need to manipulate the government because, considering the extraordinary degree of bipartisan support that it enjoys, it pretty much is the government.

Thus, the lobby paradigm (to lapse for a moment into wonk-speak) is inadequate to the subject at hand. Yet Mearsheimer and Walt cling to it regardless. They advance a dualistic view that has the US national interest in one corner and the Israel lobby in the other, with the latter consistently riding roughshod over the former. This entirely artificial distinction leads to some remarkable conclusions, the most astounding of which is that the invasion of Iraq did not originate in a breakdown or crisis in American politics but rather was imposed on a reluctant Bush Administration from without: "There is abundant evidence that Israel and the lobby played crucial roles in making that war happen.... Had the circumstances been different, they would not have been able to get the United States to go to war. But without their efforts, America would probably not be in Iraq today."

The same goes for US policy regarding Syria and Iran. According to Mearsheimer and Walt, the lobby has pushed Bush "to take a more confrontational line toward Syria than he would probably have adopted on his own," while "Israel and the lobby...are the central forces today behind all the talk in the Bush administration and on Capitol Hill about using military force to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities." If it wasn't for the lobby, they add, "the United States would almost certainly have a different and more effective Iran policy," which is to say, one that relied more on persuasion than military force.

The United States as inherently diplomatic and nonconfrontational? Few people, on either the right or left, would take such a notion seriously. Mearsheimer and Walt assume a degree of pliability on America's part that is astonishing given the record of American belligerence during the postwar period and especially since 9/11, when the United States has gone into imperial overdrive.

Nowhere is this upside-down *Weltanschauung* more apparent than in the authors' contention that oil was not a factor in the invasion of Iraq because Saddam, rather than hoarding Iraq's oil or giving it to America's enemies, would have been happy to sell it to anyone who could pay hard cash. With the price of crude hovering around $30 a barrel, roughly forty percent of the current level, petroleum in the months leading up to the war was cheap and abundant and therefore irrelevant to the decision to invade. "Moreover," Mearsheimer and Walt write, "if the United States wanted to conquer another country in order to gain control of its oil, Saudi Arabia—with larger reserves and a smaller population—would have been a much more attractive target." And since Osama bin Laden is a Saudi, like fifteen of the nineteen hijackers involved in 9/11, the attacks would have provided "an ideal pretext" for going after Saudi Arabia. Yet the United States did not attack Saudi Arabia; it attacked another country, with a larger and better armed population—and fewer oil reserves. Mearsheimer and Walt's conclusion: whatever goals the Bush Administration had on its mind going into

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By John Fleming

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Baghdad, gaining control of Persian Gulf oil reserves was not one of them.

This is remarkably simplistic. True, oil was cheap and abundant in 2003. In fact, had it not been for the US-led trade sanctions on Iraq, oil would have been more abundant, since Saddam would have had sufficient export earnings to modernize the Iraqi oil industry and increase production. But the value of oil is based on more than just its spot price, a fact that's crucial to understanding both Saddam's hold on power and America's increasingly hostile response to it.

The nations of the Persian Gulf are not only major oil exporters but also among the world's biggest consumers of military hardware. Between 1995 and 2002, according to Michael T. Klare's *Blood and Oil* (2004), eight Persian Gulf nations (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) accounted for more than $87 billion in arms purchases, more than 60 percent of it from non-US sources. The combination of petrodollars and advanced weaponry has fueled nearly three decades of war in the region and, in the process, allowed Saddam to amass an enormous amount of power even as his support was eroding at the base. The United States did not mind when he used his weaponry to attack Iran in 1980, but it was unforgiving when he used it to invade Kuwait, a close American ally, a decade later. Saddam was no longer a useful counterweight to revolutionary Iran but a problem waiting to be solved. Accumulated oil wealth and military hardware kept him in power a dozen years longer, but the delay made Bush all the more determined to take him down.

If Iraq had not been an oil exporter—if, as Noam Chomsky once observed, it had been a pickle exporter in the middle of the Indian Ocean—it would never have come into America's line of fire. Mearsheimer and Walt's failure to consider this is perplexing, as is their failure to consider what would have happened had the invasion gone according to plan. If, through some miracle, Washington had succeeded in transforming Iraq into a peaceful little outpost of American-style liberal capitalism, the United States would have gained a commanding position at the center of global oil production, one that would have enabled it to bring Iran to heel and impose "reforms" on Saudi Arabia as well. OPEC might still control energy production, but America would control OPEC, and a generation of critics of US militarism would have had to hold their tongues. As Alan Greenspan puts it in his new memoir, "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil."

As for Mearsheimer and Walt's comment that Bush would have been better off invading Saudi Arabia, all one can do is shake one's head in disbelief. The House of Saud is America's oldest ally and business partner in the Middle East, older even than Israel. For the United States to invade it after 9/11 would have been an admission that it had been wrong to go to war against Baghdad ten years earlier to protect the Saudis from the threat of an Iraqi invasion. And admitting a mistake is something an imperial power like the United States will rarely do.

*The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is filled with such bewildering moments. The authors cannot understand why Bush only mildly rebuked Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon when Sharon ordered a helicopter missile attack on Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi in the Gaza Strip in June 2003. (The attack was unsuccessful, although a second strike finished him off the following April.) The best explanation Mearsheimer and Walt can come up with is that House Speaker Tom DeLay, a Christian Zionist and therefore a charter member of the Israel lobby, threatened recriminations on Capitol Hill if the White House's response was any stronger. Yet they fail to mention that just a few months earlier in Yemen, the CIA had used a remote-controlled Hellfire missile to destroy a car containing an accused Al Qaeda leader named Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi and five others. Bush bragged about the incident in his 2003 State of the Union address, which is the chief reason he was unable to protest too vigorously when Israel used the same tactics against a leading "terrorist" of Hamas.

Curiously enough, Mearsheimer and Walt's thin sense of history resembles Bush's. Like Bush, who sees terrorism in essentially metaphysical terms (it is something evildoers do because they are evil), the authors have little to say concerning the actual social, political and historical conditions that have allowed organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to grow so powerful in the first place. The closest they come to acknowledging such conditions is when they write that "the lobby's effectiveness…reflects the basic dynamics of interest group politics in a pluralistic society. In a democracy, even relatively small groups can exercise considerable influence if they are strongly committed to a particular issue." The United States is vulnerable to manipulation by certain well-organized groups, in other words, because it is open and democratic. It is a case of America yet again being too benevolent for its own good.

Bush was a good deal more cogent when he told AIPAC in May 2004 that the reason America and Israel are natural allies is that they were

> both founded by immigrants escaping religious persecution in other lands. We have both built vibrant democracies, built on the rule of law and market economies. And we're both coun-

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the people in question

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> tries founded on certain basic beliefs: that God watches over the affairs of men and values every life.... The Israeli people have always had enemies at their borders and terrorists close at hand. Again and again, Israel has defended itself with skill and heroism. And as a result of the courage of the Israeli people, Israel has earned the respect of the American people.

Stripped of its self-serving rhetoric, what Bush's remarks boil down to is that Israel and the United States are both Zionist entities, or, if you will, crusader states convinced that they are a chosen people on a sacred mission to conquer and purify the Holy Land. Because God "values every life" within their borders, they feel justified in taking the lives of those outside to further divine goals. If "Israel has earned the respect of the American people," it is because the United States, devastated by its experience in Vietnam and humiliated by the embassy takeover in Tehran, watched with growing envy as Israel racked up stunning military victories in 1967 and 1973 and then sent specially outfitted jets streaking across the desert to bomb Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 (a feat the White House would dearly like to emulate in Iran). The Israel Defense Forces were everything that aggressive imperial elements in Washington wanted America's traumatized military to be. Hence, in their bipartisan struggle to overcome "the Vietnam syndrome," the Republicans and Democrats set about remodeling themselves as overseas branches of Israel's hawkish Likud Party. Groups like AIPAC did not grow of their own accord. Instead, the war party in Washington encouraged them to grow to help it win its battles on Capitol Hill.

The war party in Washington encouraged lobbies like AIPAC to grow to help it win its battles.

Lobbyists did not force members of Congress to give the Likud heavyweight Benjamin Netanyahu a five-minute standing ovation when he addressed a joint session in 1996. When Ariel Sharon told William Safire a couple of months after 9/11, "You in America are in a war against terror. We in Israel are in a war against terror. It's the same war," no one forced members of Congress to nod like so many bobble-heads in agreement, as Hillary Clinton did a few months later when, just as Israeli troops were invading Nablus and Jenin in the West Bank, she declared, "We are one with the Israelis. Those who have supported Israel in the past have even more of a reason to do so now." And they did so because they wanted to, because they thought the voters wanted them to or because they worried that they would be deemed unreliable if they did not. The problem is not that America is too democratic but that democratic debate about the Middle East has all but collapsed, which is the sole reason the militarists have been able to flourish.

*The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is a notable example of a new form of nativism that sees foreigners and their domestic allies as a big source of America's problems and believes that the country would be better off if it could eradicate such influences. Anti-Semitic this is not, but it is still an evasion of the truth that could turn out to be highly dangerous. America will remain in its infantilized state as long as it tries to shift blame for its ills onto foreigners and their domestic agents. It will never solve its problems until it realizes that they originate entirely at home.

In an article in *The New York Times Magazine* last January, James Traub described a lunch with Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, at which Foxman got so exercised at the suggestion that the ADL was trying to stifle criticism of Israel that "he began to choke on his gratin." Foxman's denial that the ADL intimidates critics of Israel is harder than ever to swallow following the publication of *The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control*. Criticism that "faults specific Israeli policies and proposes realistic alternatives...is legitimate," he writes. But "criticism that condemns Israel *simply for* existing and implies that the only way Israel can satisfy its critics is by disappearing is *not* legitimate" (emphasis in original).

Thus, even asking why a Christian, Muslim or white state is discriminatory but a Jewish state is not is beyond the pale. Similarly, criticism that takes into account Israel's security concerns is permissible but not "criticism that ignores every problem Israel faces, assumes that its people and leaders can accomplish anything they desire instantly and without difficulty, and therefore concludes that only bad faith or evil motives can explain any failure or error on Israel's part." While it is OK to attribute "rejectionism, hatred, violence, and terrorism" to the Palestinians, as Foxman in fact does in *The Deadliest Lies*, it is not OK to attribute them to the Israelis, since that would mean charging them with bad faith or something else equally unpleasant. Only Palestinians are capable of terrorism, not Israelis, and if you don't understand how this can possibly be, just ask the people at the ADL. They'll straighten you out.

Statements like these are absurd, of course. The question, however, is not why people like Foxman utter them but why others take them so seriously. The reason is that such statements go to the heart of the US-Israeli alliance, an alliance that, until recently, few people dared question. Foxman sums up the situation quite nicely when he writes apropos of the Holocaust, "International complicity in that crime leads many people to feel that Israel deserves support as a way of saying to the Jewish people, 'We will never again leave you without a home and a safe haven from hatred.'" Whether or not establishing the State of Israel was an appropriate response to the crimes of the Nazis—it certainly raises the question of why the Palestinians should then be forced to pay the price for the complicit parties' own misdeeds—Foxman at least makes his position crystal clear. But then he goes on to say:

> Whether or not Israel is a shining moral paragon, it certainly is not a pariah state to be condemned. It is, in fact, a nation among nations—a country much like any other, with its problems, its opportunities, its virtues, and, at times, its failings and shortcomings. In short, Israel is a "normal" country.

But is it? If it is "a country much like any other," then outsiders should be free to criticize it with the same abandon with which they might criticize Britain or France. (When was the last time someone was accused of anti-British bigotry for criticizing British policy in Northern Ireland?) But if the establishment of Israel was a form of restitution, a way of making amends for the unparalleled crime of the Holocaust, then it is not a normal country and outsiders must be careful about what they say about it, because they still owe it an enormous moral debt. Criticism is permissible except when it's not, and only the ADL and like-minded groups know whether the light is flashing green or red.

This is the great contradiction that stifles debate over the US-Israel alliance in this country. If Mearsheimer and Walt have accomplished anything, it is to demonstrate that nothing is beyond criticism, including the American-Israeli alliance, and that Foxman's self-appointed role as guardian over what Americans can and cannot say about Israel must come to an end. *The Israel Lobby* gets a lot of things wrong, but at least it gets one important thing right. ■

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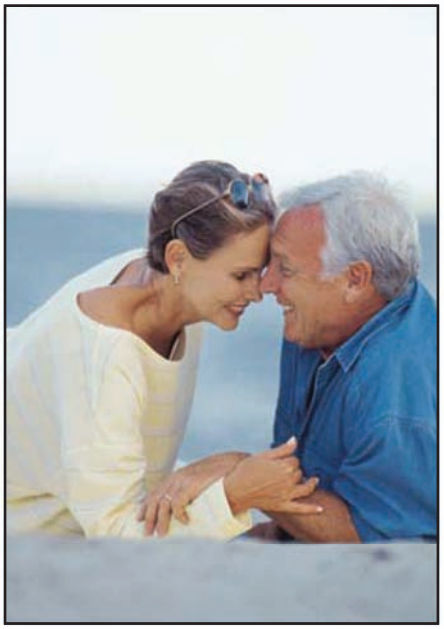

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Sonny Rollins, Christian McBride and Roy Haynes at Carnegie Hall on September 18

# Spirit Chaser

**by DAVID YAFFE**

On September 18, Carnegie Hall was a mob scene, a space so besieged that at curtain call many ticket holders were still jammed into the will-call line. They had come to hear what would happen when tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who had just turned 77, left his comfort zone. Rollins usually plays once a year in New York City, mostly on outdoor stages, where he can blow into the open air. The amplifiers reverberate, the electric bass thuds, the trombone and conga solos often ramble and roll.

But this night was different. Rollins would be joined by the upright bass virtuoso Christian McBride, 35, and Roy Haynes, 82—the last drumming master of the bebop generation. Haynes's drumming lit a fire under John Coltrane, and he also played with Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk. In 1949 he played with Rollins on *The Amazing Bud Powell: Volume 1*; the last time he'd worked with Rollins was in 1958. Rollins, McBride and Haynes would perform the same three songs that Rollins had played for his Carnegie Hall debut fifty years earlier: the blues original "Sonnymoon for Two," Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Some Enchanted Evening" from *South Pacific* and "Moritat" (better known as "Mack the Knife"). Rollins usually avoids all-star shows, but on this night he was making an exception. Library of Congress archivist Larry Applebaum had discovered a broadcast recording of Rollins's 1957 Carnegie Hall debut, and Rollins announced his plan to release it this spring on his label, Doxy, alongside a recording of the night's performance. And so I found myself at Carnegie Hall, where, like Samuel Beckett's Krapp, Rollins was set to unspool the tape of his younger self.

Music

Rollins must have felt the weight of expectations when he received a standing ovation just for showing up. He had made his debut in the room on a bill that included Chet Baker, Ray Charles and Thelonious Monk; the following year, the third-stream composer Gunther Schuller wrote "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," in which, with a canonical sweep, he invoked the names Mozart, Rembrandt and Shakespeare to convey how a solo from *Saxophone Colossus*'s "Blue 7" excelled in "thematic and structural unity" while also swinging madly. Structure and improvisation: where Apollo met Dionysus. All eyes in the jazz world were already on Rollins then, but even though critics thought he had reached a pinnacle at the tender age of 28, he just wanted to improve his chops. He also stopped playing "Blue 7."

He soon fled to the Williamsburg Bridge for a two-year sabbatical, where he blew choruses over the East River. When he took those choruses to the public again, at the East Village's Jazz Gallery and on the classic album *The Bridge* (1962), they were as spectacular as ever. But the jazz world was changing at a frenzied pace, and critical buzz, as always, was fickle. Rollins's thematic improvisation gave way to Coltrane's "sheets of sound," and by the end of the '60s, Rollins would embark on another musical sabbatical and seek enlightenment in India. His recordings from the '50s and '60s are now cherished objects in the age of reissues, but people who saw him perform then insist that he was even more spectacular when the tape decks weren't rolling. To be at the Five Spot at the right time and the right place was a jazz fetishist's very heaven.

More recent Rollins performances have had their own revelations. One night in 2000, on the second set of a gig at B.B. King's Blues Club in Manhattan, he was playing an up-tempo version of Irving Berlin's "They Say It's Wonderful." At one point, the conga and piano dropped out, and an already strong performance became incendiary. Once Rollins had only bass and drums behind him, all the splendors Schuller venerated in print in 1958 were present onstage: the tone was enormous, thick, emotive, raw, swinging and alive. It seemed like it could go on forever. Last year at Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, after he'd bid the audience farewell following a pedestrian performance, Rollins unleashed a cadenza that brought him to a point beyond euphoria, and people who had gotten up to leave stood and gawked. When we weren't expecting the sublime, we got it—and that was the point. When the moment is right, Rollins can cover the harmonic and rhythmic stratosphere like an entire orchestra.

But Rollins's Carnegie Hall reprise was a high-stakes event that didn't afford time for serendipitous discovery. Before the applause had even died down, the trio ripped into "Sonnymoon for Two," but the tune's blues, in B flat on *A Night at the Village Vanguard* and from the 1957 Carnegie gig, was transposed to E flat. Rollins didn't want to go over the same chords again; he revisited a format he hadn't played for years, but he wanted to take it someplace new. Quotations came pouring in—strands of "When the Saints Come Marching In" and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" were woven together with growls and grunts. The *South Pacific* aria "Some Enchanted Evening" had some enchanted moments. In the absence of amplifiers, Rollins's tone was brought down to a stage whisper, and when Christian McBride played a densely layered, peripatetic solo, Sonny would emerge with one-note splashes just subtle enough to fill in the space with plaintive brass. He leaned on Richard Rodgers's melody, sometimes with gruff emphasis, sometimes with poignant vibrato. When he stated the song's closing intonation—"Once you have found her,/ Never let her go"—he didn't want to let go of the phrase, repeating it like a mantra as Haynes rumbled on the cymbals. When Rollins leapt to the cadenza at the end of "Moritat"—at turns plaintive and honking—

*David Yaffe, assistant professor of English at Syracuse University, is the author of* Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing *(Princeton).*

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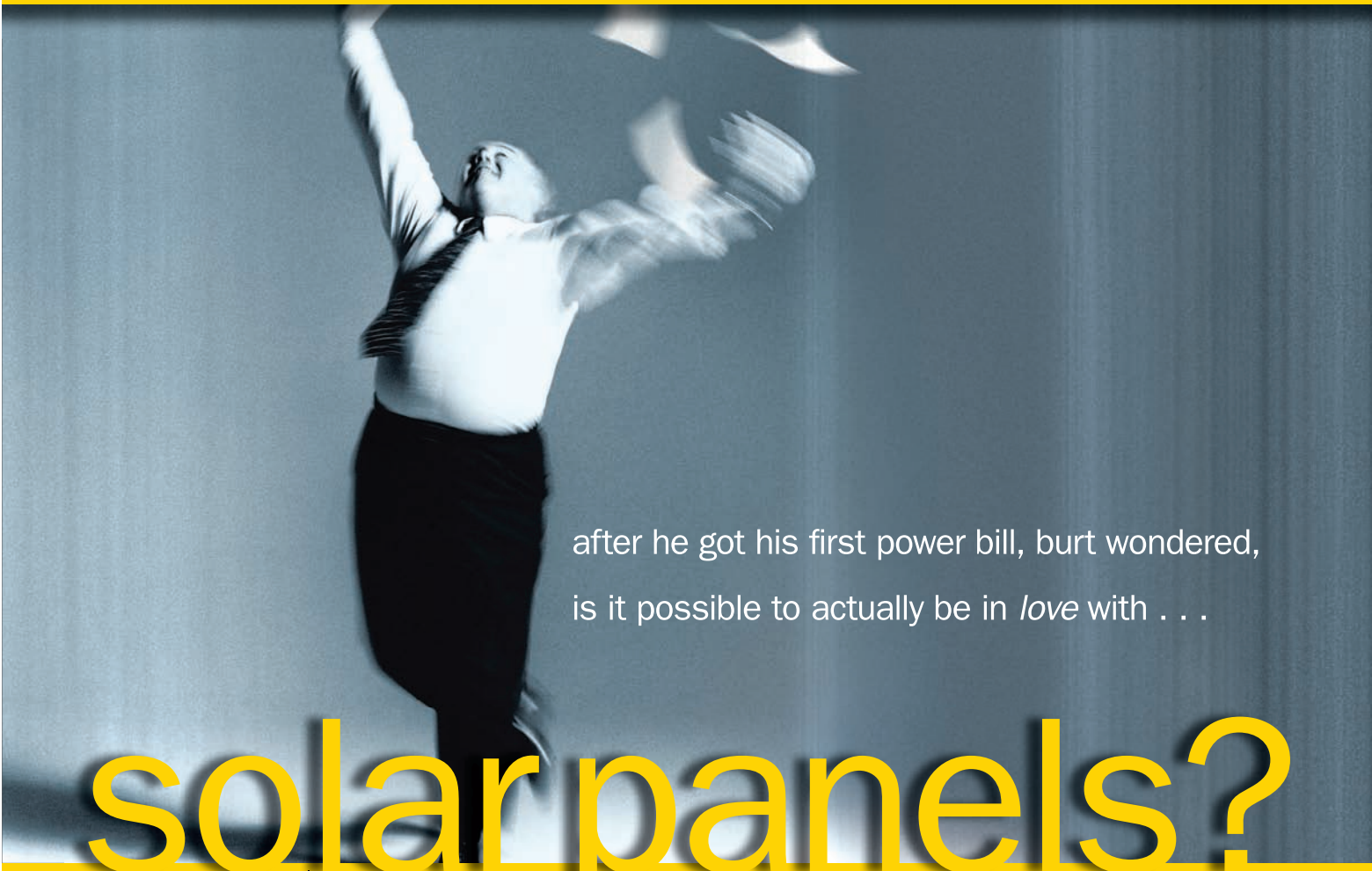

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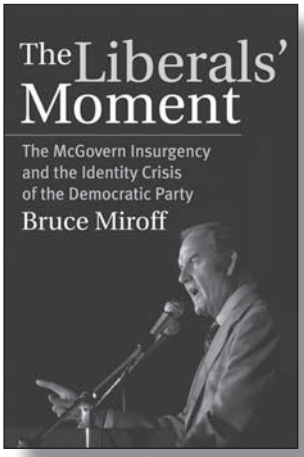


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the terminus of Brecht and Weill's gleeful ditty about a serial killer became a search to reclaim territory at the scene of a youthful triumph. Rollins, who had done so much to bring the lower notes into the harmonic vocabulary of the tenor saxophone, was leaning on the higher end of the scale, striving upward. There were many pleasures in the set, but they were delicate and subtle.

Critics being critics, we found ourselves milling around the Carnegie Hall bar after the first set to debate what it all meant. How was Sonny's tone? Were the melodic ideas sufficiently developed? How could the music possibly live up to the mountain of expectations? For twenty minutes, he had half a century of jazz to live up to. As we were looking to Sonny for some sort of deliverance, I was reminded of his reply, in last month's *Vanity Fair* Proust Questionnaire, when he was asked what living person he most admired: "Maybe my plumber."

By the time the second set began, Rollins was back with the electric bass, the congas, the amplification. It was a reckoning of Sonny past, present and, still, the future. The rest of us catalogue and live by our memories and box sets, our iPods, our fetishized versions of our past selves, but Sonny, who hates listening to his own recordings, lives in the perpetual present, good, bad or indifferent. It was a retrospective event for a jazz titan who avoids nostalgia. He pumped his fist in the air and, to the strains of "Don't Stop the Carnival," assured us that he would be seeing us again, perhaps not in another fifty years but maybe in another twenty.

Rollins had taken the stage at Carnegie Hall a little over a month after the death of Max Roach on August 16, and as we were marveling at the musical splendors of fifty years ago, we could also remember Roach blazing a calypso beat under Rollins on "St. Thomas" in 1956 or telepathically matching Rollins's phrases pulse by pulse, riding the cymbals of the musical civil rights essay "Freedom Suite" in 1958 (which Roach would follow, in 1960, with *We Insist!: Freedom Now Suite*). Roach's support on *Saxophone Colossus*'s "Moritat" was steady swing, with propulsive drum rolls between the choruses; when Haynes traded fours with Rollins on the same tune, the dialogue was looser, almost coy.

I talked to Rollins on the phone a week before the gig, and he told me that, although he was a *Nation* subscriber, he would try not to hold it against the magazine if it said something nice about him—self-criticism

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is integral to his work ethic—and that as far as he was concerned, Roach, along with Coltrane and Miles and so many departed compatriots and loved ones, were still with him. All he had to do, he said, was summon their memory and they were right next to him on the bandstand. Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future.

At Carnegie Hall, Rollins gave us a twenty-minute exploration of time past, but he is as fixated on time future as ever, in search of a musical ideal that no one has heard yet. When I asked him about the context of the performance—and whether he would want to perform in new settings, perhaps with a symphony orchestra—he replied, "What did that cat say? The medium is the message?" But for Rollins, Marshall McLuhan's maxim should be reversed: the medium is not the message. It's something that can't be measured in an all-star reunion; whoever is onstage with him, he alone is the one who brings it with him when everything is right. After the performance, 57th Street beckoned with digital distractions unfathomable the first time Rollins played Carnegie Hall. He is still looking ahead to the next gig. As he told me when I first interviewed him a dozen years ago, "I practice all the time, and I'll be there when the spirit comes." ■

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# Dark Paradise

**by CHARLES TAYLOR**

**Total Chaos**
**Chourmo**
**Solea**
All by Jean-Claude Izzo.
Translated by Howard Curtis.
Europa Editions. $14.95 each.

"Marseilles is paradise. They respect me here. I'm not a wog." That's the voice of an Algerian soldier fighting for France in Rachid Bouchareb's 2006 World War II drama *Indigènes* (released here under the terrible title *Days of Glory*). Fifty years after VE Day, the opposite could be spoken by nearly any of the contemporary Arab and Algerian characters in the hard-boiled novels that form Jean-Claude Izzo's Marseilles Trilogy. The Arab youths who endure suspicion and harassment from the cops and the prejudice of the native non-Arab French, who are the target of violence from the far-right National Front and the fool's game of fundamentalist Islam: almost all of these kids feel like wogs.

And yet, as Izzo writes of his native city, Marseilles is a kind of paradise. The three books that make up his trilogy—*Total Chaos*, *Chourmo* and *Solea*—can be read as an extended love letter to the city. Izzo, son of an Italian father who had immigrated there, spent most of his life in the city. His output wasn't vast. It included the trilogy, two novels—*The Lost Sailors* and *The Sun of the Dying* (the latter will be brought out later this year by Europa Editions)—and a book of short stories. He was one of those rare writers lucky enough to be popular with critics as well as the public, though nothing surpassed the popularity of the trilogy, which was written from 1995 to '98. Izzo never got a chance to build on the acclaim and popularity of the books. In 2000 he died of cancer at the age of 55.

In the trilogy, Izzo describes the city as an ever-unfolding flower of sensual delight, a place where natural glory, the sun and the shimmering presence of the Mediterranean exist side by side with the man-made

*Charles Taylor, a columnist for the* Newark Star-Ledger, *is a contributor to the* New York Observer, *the* New York Times, Newsday *and other publications.*

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glories of a polyglot city. At times the progress of Izzo's story might be nothing more than the movements of his hero, Fabio Montale, as he drifts from one of the city's pleasures to the next. "There's nothing more pleasant," begins *Chourmo*, "when you have nothing to do, than to have a snack in the morning and sit looking at the sea."

It's a measure of how often paradise is delayed that Fabio almost always has something to do. The Marseilles Trilogy is Fabio's story, and as with all disillusioned idealists, which is to say almost all classic heroes of detective fiction, it's the story of a romantic. Fabio starts out as a cop in *Total Chaos*, the kind who tries to take on the role of good liberal social worker. By the end of the book, in which he investigates the murders of a boyhood friend and a young Algerian girl (whom Fabio has befriended and fallen in love with), this good cop, who has solved the case, is nonetheless so disgusted by the corruption of the force that he quits and restricts himself to his little seaside bungalow, content to fish and spend time with his elderly neighbor, Honorine:

> And one day I woke up and realized I'd lost all my power. I'd been disowned by the anti-crime squad, the narcotics squad, the vice squad, the illegal immigration squad.... I'd become just a neighborhood cop who didn't get any important cases.... I wasn't the kind of cop who would shoot a punk in the back to save a colleague's skin, and that meant I was dangerous.

But of course, Fabio keeps getting pulled back in, as much by his own nature as by the fact that, in each case, a woman he loves needs him. In *Chourmo*, it's Fabio's cousin Gélou, who comes to him when her son disappears. And in *Solea*, it's Babette, a journalist and occasional lover who effects her own disappearance when a story she's working on causes the Mafia to begin hunting her.

Each of these cases is intimately bound up with Fabio's past, none more so than the murder at the beginning of *Total Chaos*, a death that leaves Fabio the last survivor of a trio that spent their adolescence pulling stickups. He called it quits after a druggist was left paralyzed in one botched job; his buddies didn't.

But the constant evocation of the past in these books serves to highlight the present and the changed city that Fabio loves too much to leave. "Marseilles is a city of exiles," Fabio says in *Chourmo*. "It'll always be the last port of call in the world. Its future belongs to those who arrive. Never to those who leave." The trilogy might be summed up by an argument that Fabio, whose parents were from southern Italy, has with Gélou after she tells him that she and her husband weren't crazy about the fact that her son's girlfriend is Arab. "What were you afraid of?" Fabio harangues her:

> That this Arab girl would stick out like a sore thumb where you live? For fuck's sake, Gélou! Don't you remember what your father was? What they called him? Your father, and mine, and all the *nabos*? Harbor dogs! That's right! And don't tell me it didn't hurt you, the fact that you were born there, in the Panier, among the harbor dogs! And now you talk to me about Arabs!

And when she replies, "My blood's Italian. Italians aren't Arabs," Fabio explodes. "The South isn't Italy. It's the land of the wops. You know what the people in Piedmont call us? The Mau Mau. That includes niggers, Gypsies, and all the wops south of Rome!"

For all the attraction that crime fiction has for those of us who still read for plot, it's curious that when we find a writer whose voice we respond to, a hero we care about, the action becomes almost secondary. Izzo is a sharp, complex plotter, but he can't resist indulging in descriptions of the pleasures the city offers. Food and music are integral. The sections on the proper way to desalt cod and the right wine to accompany a midmorning snack of anchovy puree; the recipe for lasagna sauce to dress a fennel-stuffed bass: these are not digressions, not the cutesy gourmand asides that cozy up other mysteries. These passages are the living essence of the book, Proustian cues that summon Fabio's past, conjurations of the flavors, literal as well as figurative, that still haunt him. Each description of food or cooking is lovingly, tantalizingly drawn out, meant to convey a particular mixture of brininess and just-caught freshness, as well as the sense of pleasure that, like a good wine, comes with a long finish. "We launched on a major survey of foreign cuisines. Considering the number of restaurants between Aix and Marseilles, it was likely to take us many months.... Top of our list was the Mille et une nuits.... You sat on pouffes and ate from a big brass platter, listening to raï. Moroccan cuisine. The most refined in North Africa. They served the best pigeon *pastilla* I've ever tasted." Fabio, who narrates the books, even describes sex in terms of spices. For Izzo, those descriptions are a lover's testimony, whether the object of his ardor is Marseilles

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or one of the women by whom Fabio tries, doggedly but often futilely, to do justice.

If Izzo uses food to stand for the city's sensuality, he uses music to bring to life its ethnic jumble. The sounds wafting—or blaring—out of bars and clubs and radios and stereos come across less like a battle in which every voice is fighting to be heard than a din in which every voice finds the freedom to speak up. The glut of music may be the only real democracy in the city. The Arab and Algerian youths listen to Marseilles rappers IAM and the fabulous MC Solaar. "Marseilles was a place where people liked to talk a lot," says Fabio. "Rap was just talk, and lots of it. Our Jamaican cousins had brothers here. The rappers talked the way people talked in bars. About Paris, the centralized state, the decaying suburbs, the night buses. Their lives, their problems. The world, seen from Marseilles."

Rap isn't Fabio's music, but nearly everything else is. Among his touchstones are Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*, Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, Sonny Rollins's *The Bridge* and Mongo Santamaría. Gypsy songs play in bars. Salsa provides the soundtrack for a night Fabio spends dancing with Marie-Lou, the prostitute who's his sometime lover. And the defeatist romantic melancholy that increasingly takes over the trilogy as it works toward its awful, devastating ending—a mood that can be traced right back to the 1937 film *Pépé le Moko*—is represented by the *chansons* of the anarchist singer-composer Léo Ferré (and occasionally by his contemporaries Georges Brassens and Jacques Brel). In *Chourmo*, Fabio finds an Algerian veteran beaten in his home, the old man's war medal, the symbol of belief that he would be accepted by the country he fought for, shoved into his mouth. The two of them find an unexpected connection in their shared love of Lili Boniche, the Algerian-Jewish singer whose music, with its African, Arab, Spanish and *chanson* influences, is its own melting pot. When the elderly gentleman hears the name, Fabio observes, "The old man smiled. For a moment he was lost in thought, lost, I was sure, in a place where life was good." And the music is verbal, too:

> As a child of the East, she considered that the French language was becoming a place where the migrant could draw together strands from all the lands through which he had passed and finally feel at home. The language of Rimbaud, Valéry and René Char would crossbreed, she asserted. It was the dream of a generation of North African immigrants. You already heard a strange kind of French spoken in Marseilles, a mixture of Provencal, Italian, Spanish and Arabic, with bits of slang thrown in. Speaking it, the kids understood each other perfectly well. At least on the streets.

One of the pities of Izzo's early death is that it deprived us of continuing to read him on the question of Arabs in Europe. His conclusions refuse the unexamined assumptions of both right and left and fail to satisfy either extreme, making his voice all the more valuable—and necessary.

As the exchange between Fabio and Gélou suggests, Izzo is alive to—and disgusted by—the prejudice that exists toward Arabs. His realization that, for many young immigrants, crime is not just a more profitable life but possibly the only work open to them puts his work in line with classic muckraking liberal melodrama. As a cop, Fabio is hounded by the fact that by the time he's aware of kids in trouble, it may be too late for them. They, and their parents, are caught between being immigrants in a land where you are despised and where no real opportunity awaits and a homeland that leaves you feeling just as much of an outcast. An Algerian man returns home in *Total Chaos* only to find that "Algeria wasn't his story anymore. It was a story that didn't interest him. The empty, neglected shops. The land, parceled out to former mujaheddin and left uncultivated. The deserted villages, turned in on their own misery."

There's an echo of this in *Chourmo*, of finding the foreign in the place that is supposed to feel like home. The young Arab girl whom Gélou rejected as a suitable girlfriend for her missing son has an older brother who has adopted Islamist militancy. He forces his mother to serve him with her eyes lowered and throws his sister out of the house because she's dating a non-Arab boy.

Had Izzo lived, he'd have had to navigate the line between the right wing's emboldened prejudice toward Arabs in the wake of 9/11 and the left's predilection for classifying people who stand up to the misogyny and homophobia of Islamism as tools of the right. The depth of feeling in the trilogy, the hatred of bullying in all its forms and most of all the tenderness with which Izzo writes of women suggest he'd have been more than up to the task. Someone as in love with Marseilles's multiplicity of culture as Izzo was could never fall for separatist rhetoric, no matter what progressive clothes it disguises itself in. The unattainable dream that haunts the Marseilles Trilogy is the pursuit of pluralism.

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# Events

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### Universal Health Care Foundation of New York

■ Inaugural reception, October 30, 5–7 PM at Cherkasky-Davis Conference Center, SEIU-1199, 330 W. 42nd St., 33rd floor. Honor outstanding leaders and organizations that have contributed greatly to the universal healthcare movement: Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, Dr. Oliver Fein and the NY State Nurses Association. For invitations to the reception and information about the foundation, visit www.rekindlingreform.org/topic/index.htm,loulevi@aol.com or write Universal Health Care Foundation of New York, 155 W. 72nd St., Suite 402, New York, NY 10023.

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■ Join us to honor the life and enduring contribution of Moe Fishman, the voice of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Music, speakers, memories, inspiration and refreshments. All are invited. Feel free to bring copies of memorabilia, photographs, letters and poetry to add to a timeline banner of Moe's life. Saturday, November 10, 10:30 AM. Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square South. Accessible entrance on Thompson Street. In Moe's memory, friends and family of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade are organizing to carry Moe's activist vision to future generations. If you would like to be part of Friends and Family or would like information about the memorial, call (212) 989-8624.

### Tipitapa Sister City's Twentieth

■ Join us to celebrate twenty years of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua on Sunday, October 28, 5 PM, at Manhattan Country School, 7 E. 96th St. Honoring: Jessie Cagan, activist award presented by Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights; Dr. Steven Tamarin, activist and family physician award presented by Dr. Neil Calman, president of The Institute for Family Health and professor of clinical family medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University; and a tribute to the life of Dr. Irving Mauss (1914–2007), board member. Special recognition to the District 3 Computer School community along with other young people who have helped. www.tipitapa.org. Dos Pueblos, 155 W. 72nd St., 402. info@tipitapa.org. (646) 610-2215.

## WASHINGTON, DC

### 70 Years of Law for the People!

■ National Lawyers Guild's 70th anniversary convention, October 31–November 4. Activist-lawyers, law students, legal workers, jailhouse lawyers share social justice legal/organizing strategies. For information, call (212) 679-5100 ext. 13 or visit www.nlg.org.

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The Marseilles Trilogy may be the most lyrical hard-boiled writing yet. And if Izzo has earned a place in the ranks of the finest hard-boiled writers, it's worth noting that he's done it while largely avoiding the shining angel/*femme fatale* polarities of the genre. Even the women who turn out to be duplicitous are extended compassion, a willingness to comprehend the logic of their actions. Women found to be liars are, in detective fiction, usually treated as the most treacherous of creatures. By contrast, here is how Izzo writes of one woman who has just confessed her lies: "The most important thing, though, was that, free now of lies, [her eyes] were no longer indifferent. They'd become human. Full of pain, but also full of hope." The rest are written of so tenderly that their departure, sometimes just the threat of their departure, leaves wounds in stories that are already bleeding from the departure of others.

As the trilogy moves into the final book, the pleasures the book offers—food, music, sex, camaraderie, the pull of the sea—are increasingly overtaken by the dark undertow that has been waiting all along. *Solea* takes its name from the final track of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*, one of the series of great albums Davis made in collaboration with arranger Gil Evans. Davis's trumpet, playing over Evans's steady, relentless orchestral pulse, the sound of a growing storm that will not break, is an insistently, even defiantly lonely sound. Sometimes it cries out in a single sustained note, sometimes it dies down in a muted passage that could be the muttering of a heartbroken man. It's anguished and discordant, soaring and battered, not so much accompanied by the music underneath as fighting it. Davis sounds as if he wants to join that music, and as if he knows he can't. As the piece rolls toward the end of its twelve-plus minutes, the drums become more prominent, and they could be a march into battle or honors played as a coffin is lowered into the ground. In his liner notes to the album, Nat Hentoff characterized it as possessing "the 'deep song' of flamenco and the cry of the blues." Whatever it is, it's the music of the Marseilles Trilogy, as vast and alluring and annihilating as Fabio's beloved Mediterranean, where the story comes to its close. But if novels need a written, instead of a musical, coda, the last lines of Godard's *Pierrot le fou*, spoken by characters who are already ghosts, will do:

She's found again
What?
Eternity
It's the sea… run away
With the sun ■

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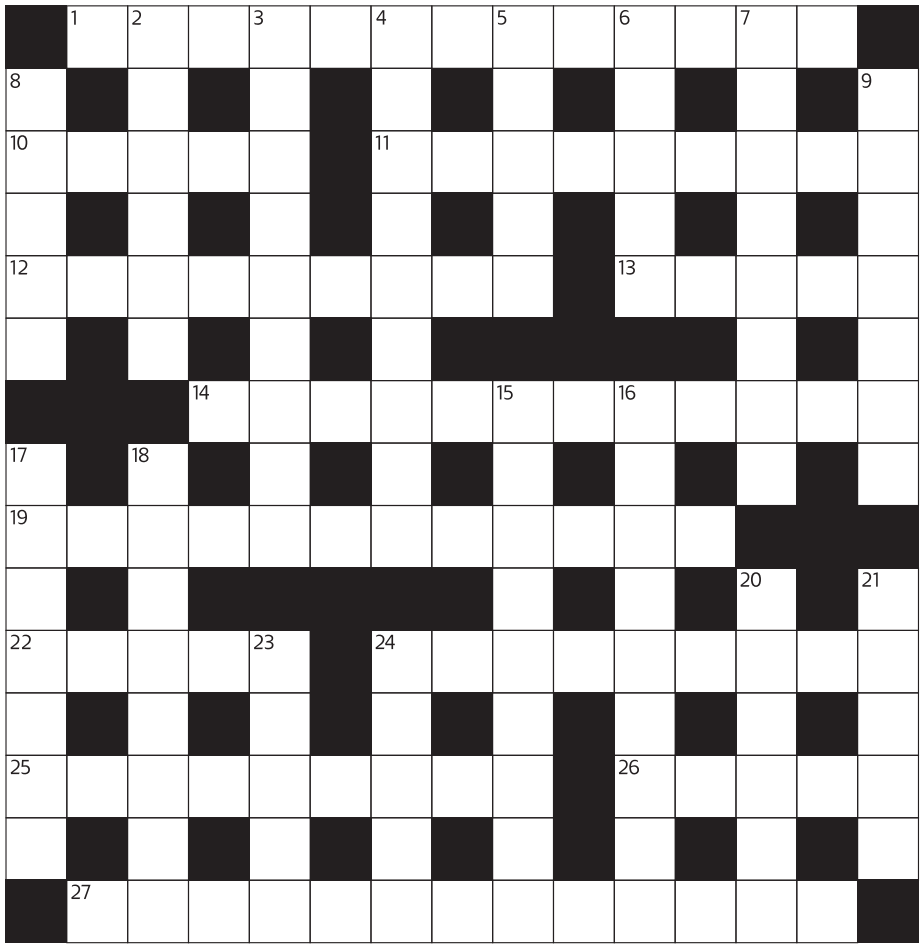
# Puzzle No. 3099

FRANK W. LEWIS



## ACROSS

**1** In an auto, a certain arrangement has nothing in it, but it means jail time! (13)

**10** The bird seems to be unhappy headless. (5)

**11** The sort of ingle a common guy is thoughtless about. (9)

**12** Hot spot, at a sort of it, or a reproduction thereof. (9)

**13** The color associated with a cuttlefish? (5)

**14** Perhaps said very quietly with the direction a finger ornament takes, in the vanishing act. (12)

**19** Old enough to have male or female grow old, then hurried back to John in Glasgow! (12)

**22** To talk, commonly, of the old Roman habit. (5)

**24** People who sell belts, perhaps. (9)

**25** A medley (flowery or musical) with the vessel to ladle out a little state of it. (9)

**26** A broken lease might just hold that picture! (5)

**27** What the little star of song should be doing, in more fancy manner. (13)

## DOWN

**2** Hurried up with a line that is either "straight" or "strait." (6)

**3** Writing to the French, in the sort of hot circle. (9)

**4** Examines rail transport to hold things up. (9)

**5** Not left—correct? (5)

**6** Stumbles over what vacationers often take. (5)

**7** Above the beatnik's apartment, with one inside, is one of three things the Brits said the Americans were. (8)

**8** Pretty neat! (5)

**9** Possibly gets around what the aspiring politician did, which is rather odd. (7)

**15** The peril Anne, in trouble, is enduring. (9)

**16** What people who are "cellared" may have, which is pretty low down! (9)

**17** I drink to excess thus, but that's elemental! (7)

**18** Interpretative, in a fancy way, with the former spouse to obtain crushed ice around it. (8)

**20** Perhaps I or Adam was the first one. (6)

**21** Quiet sort of alms—one of those things found in the Good Book. (5)

**23** What the blushing maiden of old romance seemed always about to do—having a point, and so on about it. (5)

**24** As the Brits say, "Golly! That American soldier is a real dog!"(5)

**ALL MIXED UP!** In last week's puzzle, the clues for 16 and 20 down are reversed. Ape igloos, aisle goop, a loose pig, sepia logo, a goose lip—twisted, confused and crushed. Also, the word "find" is missing from the clue to 14 across.

## SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3098

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | I | M | P | R | O | P | R | I | E | T | Y | | |
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| R | O | T | U | N | D | A | S | | O | L | I | V | E | R |
| | D | | N | | R | | T | | N | | E | | P | |
| T | I | P | T | O | E | D | | P | E | R | F | E | C | T |
| | A | | A | | S | | C | | R | | | | A | |
| S | K | E | I | N | S | | H | E | S | I | T | A | T | E |
| | | | N | | | | E | | | | A | | | |
| P | E | A | S | A | N | T | S | | T | O | R | S | O | S |
| | L | | | | O | | T | | O | | P | | R | |
| B | E | S | L | I | M | E | | O | R | G | A | N | D | Y |
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| B | E | A | C | O | N | | S | T | E | E | L | E | R | S |
| | N | | K | | E | | I | | N | | I | | S | |
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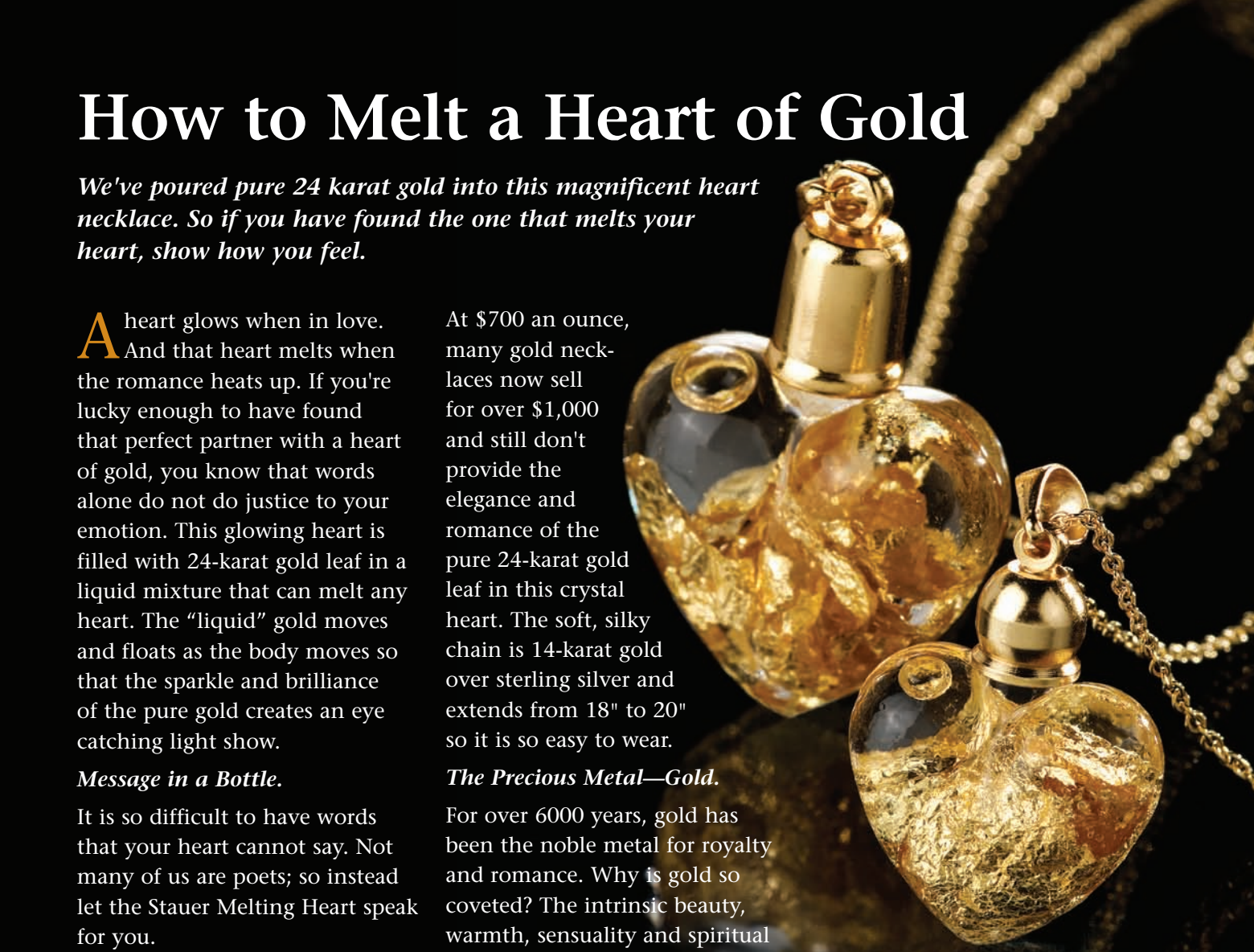

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***From this day forward,***
***You shall not walk alone.***
***My heart will be your shelter,***
***And my arms will be your home.***
***—Anonymous***

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